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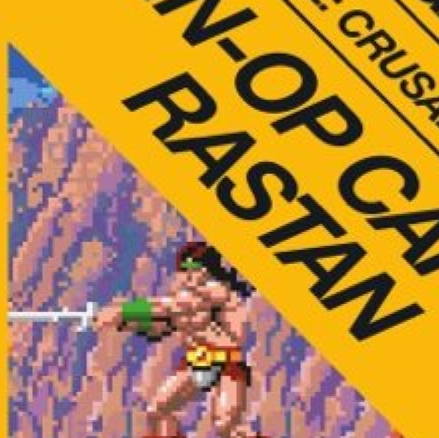
"Galaxian and Galaga are completely different games" – Shigeru Yokoyama

STEVE WETHERILL ON NODES OF YESOD

THE CLASSIC GAME: PARODIUS

RETRO REVIVAL: CRUSADER: NO REMORSE

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THE RETROBATES

FIRST ARCADE GAME YOU EVER PLAYED?



DARRAN JONES
Space Invaders or *Pac-Man*. My dad used to go gigging a lot, so I remember playing these standing on a chair.
Expertise:
Juggling **Retro Gamer**, a gorgeous wife and two beautiful girls
Currently playing:
Magic: The Gathering Online
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT
My dad's favourite watering hole had *Out Run*, *Space Invaders*, *Rastan* and *Pole Position* in its family room. Knowing me, it was likely *Out Run* that I flocked to first.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
EDF: Insect Armageddon
Favourite game of all time:
EDF: Insect Armageddon



PAUL DAVIES
Space Invaders in Tescos, my mate paid for my go. I'm sure it didn't last very long.
Expertise:
Repeatedly banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
Halo: Reach
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



IAIN LEE
I think it was *Popeye*. It may have been *Donkey Kong*, but I'm pretty sure it was *Popeye*. I certainly remembered getting obsessed by it.
Expertise:
Using a fake American accent to trick Americans on Xbox Live
Currently playing:
Halo: Reach
Favourite game of all time:
Elite (the BBC version)



CRAIG GRANNELL
I distinctly remember playing *Space Invaders*, with my dad giving me a leg-up so I could see the screen. He regretted that when I started doing rather well.
Expertise:
Games that don't require 36 fingers to play
Currently playing:
Zookeeper
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



JASON KELK
I can just about remember a lot of blasting, at what was probably a bootleg *Space Invaders*, at the local university for 10p a go.
Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero
Currently playing:
Jamestown (PC)
Favourite game of all time:
Io

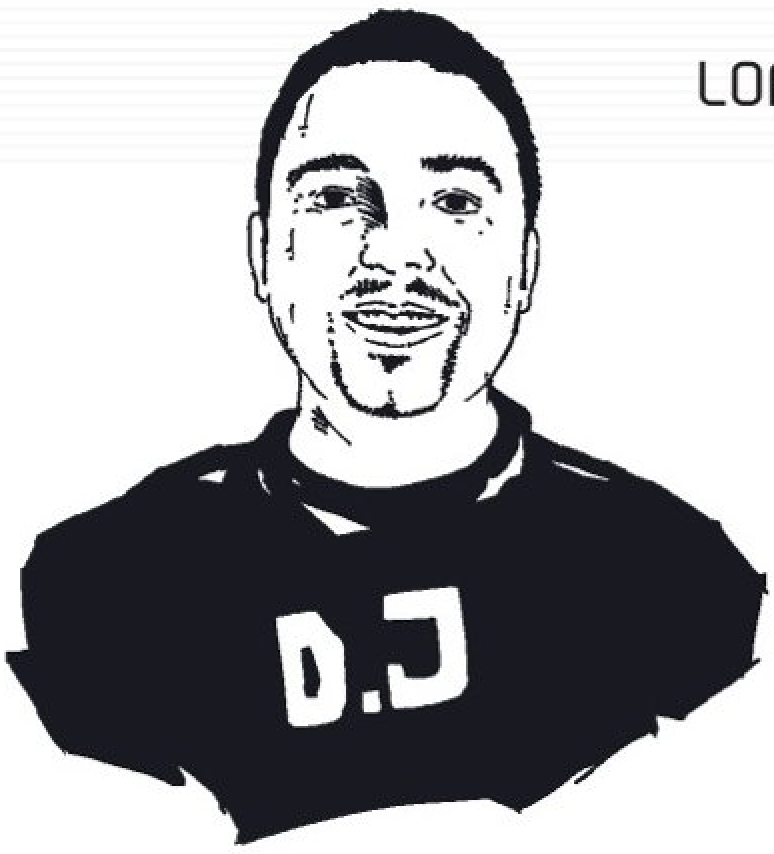


PAUL DRURY
Boot Hill at Ripley Swimming Pool 11 September 1977. The 10p from the changing room locker went straight into the machine and I've never looked up since.
Expertise:
Zener diodes
Currently playing:
Astro Wars
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep in Space



MARTYN CARROLL
That'd be Capcom's *1942*. I played it at a caravan park in Devon when I was about seven and I've had a soft spot for the game ever since.
Expertise:
8-bits and bobs
Currently playing:
From Dust
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy

LOADING...



It was about eight years ago that I first came into contact with the game that adorns our cover. It was part of a museum exhibit at the Barbican Centre, and while it wasn't working at the time, it nevertheless managed to look resplendent in all its fibreglass glory.

Odds are many of you haven't played it either (it wasn't exactly a commercial success) so you're probably wondering why it's on our cover. While many would call it a failure, *Computer Space* was still the first ever commercial arcade game, and as arcades pretty much started our industry, we'd be silly to not feature it.

In fact, this month is pretty much the genesis issue, because in addition to the creation of *Computer Space*, we also have a brilliantly documented account of Atari, the first videogame publisher, which all ties in with our remit of informative, in-depth articles that don't exist anywhere else.

As videogame magazines continue to kick against the ever-increasing pull of the net, it's truly satisfying to know that **Retro Gamer** continues to go from strength to strength. And it's thanks to great articles like the ones in this very issue that allow us to do just that.

Enjoy the magazine,



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>> Load 93 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED

RETRO REVIVALS



In the hot seat this month…







"Few arcade experiences feel this fast" Samuel Roberts



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78 Quake

John Romero and John Carmack look back at 15 years of fragging

retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



24 CUTHBERT IN THE JUNGLE

The prolific Ian Marks turns out another excellent revival. This time looking at a superb *Pitfall!* clone.





ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED





retroradar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> This month has seen a number of exciting returns to videogames. Gremlin and Bounder are back from the dead and heading to iOS, while the awesome Strider returns in Ultimate Marvel Vs. Capcom 3. I think I need to have a lie down…

CONTENTS



GREMLIN'S BACK

WE SPEAK TO GREMLIN FOUNDER IAN STEWART ABOUT RESURRECTING GREMLIN IN A NEW iOS VENTURE.

After disappearing during the PSone era, Gremlin Graphics is reopening for business. Gremlin founder Ian Stewart's new iOS game publisher, Urbanscan, own the rights to a number of old Gremlin licenses and Ian is planning to release new versions of Gremlin classics through a brand new label that he is calling Gremlin Presents. We caught up with Ian this month to find out more.

RG: So, how does it feel to be resurrecting Gremlin Graphics after all this time?
IS: It gives you that warm fuzzy feeling. It's been good reminiscing and talking about the things we did during the Eighties and Nineties. We're looking forward to working on some of the products that we brought to market over that time.

RG: Is this something that you've been planning for a while now?
IS: I've owned various properties and IPs for some considerable time and I just felt it was about time we did something with them. I think the market is ready for them.

RG: Why have you chosen the iOS format to release these games?
IS: I had no desire to get back into the console market, and I think the type of products that Gremlin produced in the Eighties are more suitable for those platforms.

RG: So there's no chance of seeing these games appearing on digital services such as Steam and XBLA?
IS: We've already got a *Premiership Manager* on PSN, and have a new version of that coming out in October this year. It may be that if there's something we feel does require a bigger production then we may look to other publishers.

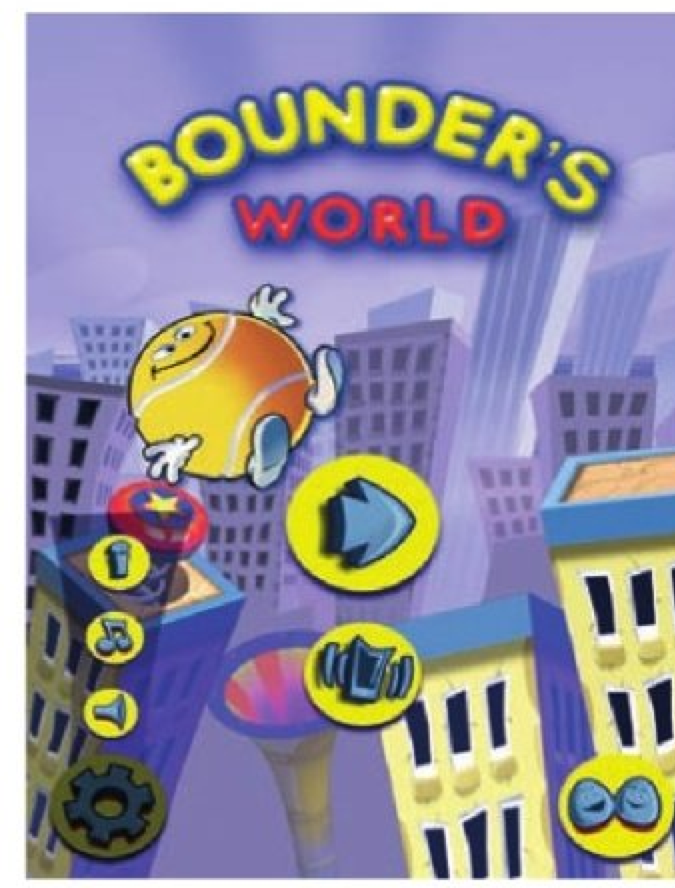
RG: What can you tell us about the new *Bounder* game that is coming out?
IS: *Bounder* was one of my all-time favourite games that we published, and we were looking at the best products for us to rework and reintroduce to the consumer. I think unanimously we decided that *Bounder* was a really good starting point for us. We felt we could take the flavour or the product and the character and produce a product that would make best use of the device.

RG: Is there any truth in the rumour that you are currently planning a reunion with Peter Harrap?
IS: Well we've been in contact and exchanged emails but whether anything comes of that I'm not sure yet.

RG: You would obviously be looking to come up with fresh new directions for these characters?
IS: Absolutely, I think you have to. I don't see any point in just copying what's been done in the past.

RG: Are there any other Gremlin coders that you'd like to get in touch with?







» [iOS] The first game released under the Gremlin Presents label is *Bounder World*. It's a great game and brilliant choice for the platform.

GO DEEPER

>> Based in Sheffield, Gremlin Interactive (formerly Graphics) was established in 1984. The studio was bought by Infogrames in 1999 and became Infogrames Studios Sheffield.

>> Sumo Digital was founded by several key managers of Infogrames Studios Sheffield, following the studio's closure in 2003.

>> *Bounder World* will be the first game to be released under the revived Gremlin label.







» [iOS] Ian is hoping to bring brand new versions of *Thing On A Spring*, *Zool*, *Monty Mole* and perhaps even *Jack The Nipper* to iOS.

IS: I'm still in touch with a good number of them, and I think with the announcement of the Gremlin Presents label there will be a few forums that will start buzzing and people start talking. Although there's quite a healthy ex-Gremlin community anyway, so we will maybe try to arrange a bit of a get together but a lot of them are based all around the world now, so that does make it a bit hard.

> **"We were looking at the best products for us to rework and reintroduce to the consumer."**

RG: Could you tell us which games you're hoping to release next and why you think they'll work?
IS: I think people seem to be focused on the character games initially, so we're looking at *Thing On A String* and *Monty Mole*. And then there's *Zool*, obviously, which was probably our most successful character. They will all most definitely make a return, but it's not going to be this year, maybe next year. There are also a number of products like *Loaded* and *Re-Loaded*, which were original PSone products.

RG: And what sort of price points will you be looking to put these games out at?
IS: We're going to be at the lower end, and we'll build our market from there. I do foresee the market maturing slightly and probably getting a little more expensive as we go forward. As more is put into products, you are likely to see the price creep up a little. But we will be at the lower end of the market.

RG: Since you've broken the news, what has been the reaction from the fans so far?
IS: It's been very positive; people seem to be getting very excited about it.

RG: Finally, do you have any concerns about these games living up to expectations as they've built up a lot of cherished memories?
IS: Not at all, that's why we're not going down the route of emulating these old products but are looking at the products that we can best bring to the market for today's consumer. *

Future Classics?

» The Gremlin games possibly coming soon to iOS.



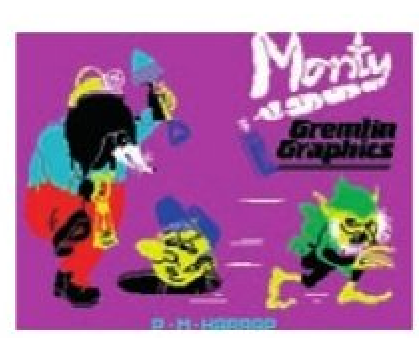
Zool

The titular ninja gremlin was one of Gremlin's most successful game franchises, so it's little surprise that he is among the characters that Gremlin is especially keen to breathe new life into. That *Zool* is a nippy platform game means the developer will really need to nail the controls to make it work, but perhaps even more of an issue: are Chupa Chups lollipops still around anymore? We think they are. In any case, a new *Zool* game – whatever direction it takes – is certainly something to get excited about.



Loaded

As well as Gremlin's early computer output, Ian also revealed that he is also considering remaking the studio's later console games. A series that was mentioned was *Loaded* and *Re-Loaded* for PSone which were among the last releases by Gremlin before the studio was acquired by Infogrames. Top-down shooters do seem to work well on the platform, and we think the series' gritty look, cast of oddball antiheroes, and PSone heritage will make it a sensible fit. This could be one to watch.



Monty Mole

Ian told us he would be keen to release a new *Monty* game, and is in touch with *Monty Mole*'s creator Peter Harrap – who, back in April, revealed to Eurogamer that he too would like to create a new *Monty Mole* game. Therefore, the likelihood of this reunion happening is looking very likely indeed. So what sort of witty predicament will Monty find himself in? He's been in prison, on the run, and involved in the miner's strike. Only time will tell what he'll be up to, although in his interview Peter did mention something about Monty possibly having kids.

THE RETRO DEBATE

» Which Gremlin games should be revisited?

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

the_hawk
Monty Mole! An absolute 8-bit legend. Although if it's going to be on an iThing they'll have to do something to rework the controls as the vast majority of Eighties platform games are not suited to pretendy pseudo-virtual joypads, unfortunately.

Greyfox
Supercars all the way baby. Plus, make sure they have it on Game Centre too… wouldn't mind having a go against other player here at the forum.

theantmeister
Well if I can't have *Fatal Racing/Whiplash*, I'll have *Supercars* thanks!

AlleyKat
I voted for *Monty Mole*, but a *Trailblazer/Cosmic Causeway* sequel would be cool with me as well. A *Monty Mole* game would have to ignore *Impossamole* & be a return to the vintage *Monty*.

Edwards80
Supercars was my choice from that list. A remake of *Harlequin* would be very, very welcome!

lanky316
All of them in due time hopefully! Will say *Monty Mole* as I think it's perhaps more memorable to non-retro addicts like us!

Antiriad2097
I think they're off to a very strong start with *Bounder*. With a rework of the controls, it could fit in very well with touch screen devices. *Trailblazer* would be the obvious follow up to that and, again, I think a control revision could see a playable iGame.

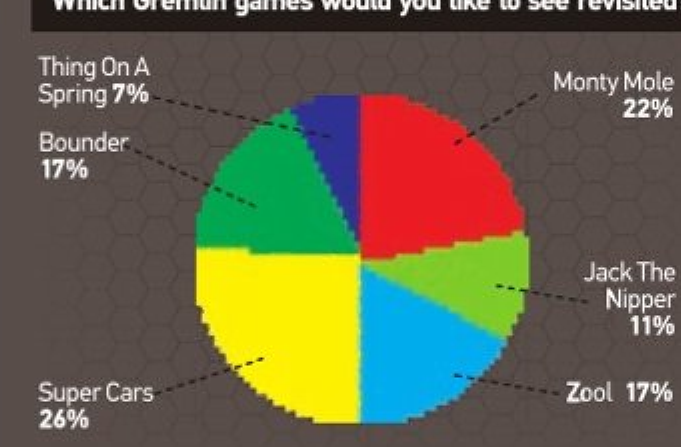
Jay
None of the above. *West Bank* please.

webding
I can't believe *Jack The Nipper* has got so few votes, absolute genius to mix tough puzzles with being a full-on git.

Fred83
Zool, and maybe fix a few colour clashes that annoyed us in the Amiga games.

FORUM OPINION

Which Gremlin games would you like to see revisited?



Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *Two Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.

I will complete Manic Miner, even though it's impossible
I will complete Manic Miner, even though it's impossible
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I will complete



Hi there. My name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

The Kids Are Alright

I recently got asked by a very nice chap if I would contribute to an event he was running at his school. Mr Hardisty was putting on a week of events for the kids (anyone younger than me is a kid) based around retro games. I was impressed, but also saddened. It means I am officially old. The things I did in my youth are being studied in the way that my generation looked at WWII and crop rotation. On a side note, all I can remember about the agricultural revolution from history lessons is the acronym Tiny Tims Winkle Bends Greatly Every Cold Winter. I have no idea what that means, but it's pretty much the only history fact I remember. Well done British education.

I recorded some nonsense for them and sent it off. The pupils obviously wouldn't have a clue who I was, but if they were told I was a 'celebrity', that would probably be enough for them to get a bit excited. I had a similar experience a few weeks ago when I was asked to open a fete at a residential home for elderly and disabled people. No one there had any idea who I was, but when I was introduced as having been on '*This Morning*', they all suddenly sat up in their wheelchairs and took interest. I had so many pictures taken that afternoon (three) with residents who said 'I've never heard of you, but you've met Phillip Schofield.' Almost as if some of Pip's magic would rub off onto them. (For the record, the silver fox has NEVER rubbed off on me. That is a vicious rumour).

It's pretty exciting that young people are getting taught this kind of stuff. This is social and technological history in its purest form. Will they be that interested in it though? Or would it all look like some kind of crap, pixelated joke? I think I've mentioned here before the time I showed my Greek 11-year-old cousin, Alexandros, *Repton* on my phone. I was met with such disinterest that I got really embarrassed and actually apologised to him for wasting his time.

I'm now a father, and in my head I have a cruel trick brewing that I would like to play on my son. Astro Boy is only 18 months old, so I could do this. Basically, for the first 12 years of his life, I only show him old technology – VHS, BBC Micro, records. And then on his 13th birthday, totally blow his mind by telling him that overnight there have been loads of new discoveries. Then I'll whip out the 360, my iPod, the laptop. Imagine if gadgets had advanced that quickly in your life? Could your head cope with it all in one go? Probably not. It would feel like some kind of motionless time travel.

Anyway, I am genuinely interested to know if you've shown your kids your retro collection and what their reaction was. Would you mind dropping me an email? iain@iainlee.com – it might make interesting reading.

> For the first 12 years of his life, I'll only show my son old technology





» The exhibition doesn't just feature games and consoles, but other items too, such as memorabilia and old gaming magazines. Even **Retro Gamer** gets a mention.

LIBRARY OFFERS R&R: READING & RETRO

HIGH WYCOMBE LIBRARY HOSTS AN EXHIBITION ON GAMING HISTORY, AND INVITES RETRO GAMER TO TAKE A LOOK

When was the last time you visited a library? Be honest. For many of you we'd wager it was quite a long while ago. Was Mr. Blobby still on the television? Maybe England had just won the World Cup? Perhaps your next door neighbour was a Viking?

Venture into a library these days and you'll discover a lot has changed. Realising that they must move with the times in order to attract a new generation of customers, libraries have now diversified into the realms of casual learning zones, sedate internet cafés (sans the food), and even movie rental stores. But with libraries up and down the country struggling to attract young people through their doors, which makes it difficult for them show off the many services that they now offer, some are looking to other ways to generate interest. Among them is High Wycombe Library, which is currently hosting an exhibition about the history of videogaming.

Looking to compare gaming old with gaming new, and shine a spotlight over some classic games and systems of yesteryear, the exhibition contains over 175 different items, and around a dozen machines ranging from the ZX Spectrum, various Nintendo handhelds, to more recent consoles like the Xbox.

"There is quite an emphasis on handheld stuff, specifically Nintendo, and also a lot of memorabilia too. Aside from the consoles and games we have magazines, figurines and manuals," explains library senior supervisor Rob Andrews, who helped to organise the exhibition. "We get loads of people enquiring about social history and world history, and in the past we've done a few bits and pieces on the history of toys, but videogaming is just as important in history. We just wanted to show people how it used to be and how it is now."

So what has been the reaction from people so far? "It's quite varied really", adds Rob. "The younger kids are swarming towards the modern bits like *Mario*, but when they come in with their parents there's been quite a few times where the parents have been going specifically towards the older computers. I think the teenagers seem to be more interested in the modern stuff, but when you enter a conversation with them and explain how it used to be you can see they're interested in how things have grown and progressed."

As well the exhibition, the library will be hosting a number of gaming events to allow people to stop by and play these old machines for themselves.

If the exhibition is a success then a similar one is planned for next year, but one that will have a focus entirely on classic games and computers. Of course, with funds limited, we're sure the library would be grateful for any retro gaming lends and donations. Therefore, if you have the odd computer or console that's not being put to use, or is simply collecting dust up in your loft, and wouldn't mind lending or donating it to them for its next exhibition, please get in touch.

The exhibition is running until 2 October. To find out more, or to discover when the retro gaming events will be taking place, you can visit the library's website, http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/bcc/libraries/Branches/wycombe.page, or call them on 0845 2303232. ✱



MICROBYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



>> Jim's Gems

If there was a Good Retro Pub Guide, the Lass O'Gowrie would be on the cover. This Manchester boozer already has *Paperboy*, *Pac-Man* and half a dozen other machines, and monthly retro gaming nights. Last month's In Da 80s was a weekend of retro, featuring live coding, industry veterans Andy 'Taskset' Walker and Jim 'Ocean' Bagley, computer-assisted comedy from Graham Goring and Ginger La Rouge's *Sonic* burlesque show. See www.thelass.co.uk



>> Music for our Ears

This month we were contacted by a musician by the name of Heath McNease, who told us about an indie music project he's been working on. *Straight Outta Console* is a hip hop mix tape that features 19 tracks laced with NES samples from games such as *Punch-Out!!*, *Paperboy*, and *Super Mario Bros 3*. We enjoyed it so much we thought we'd spotlight it. You can listen or download it at: **heathmcnease.bandcamp.com**



>> Spy vs. Spy to infiltrate Hollywood

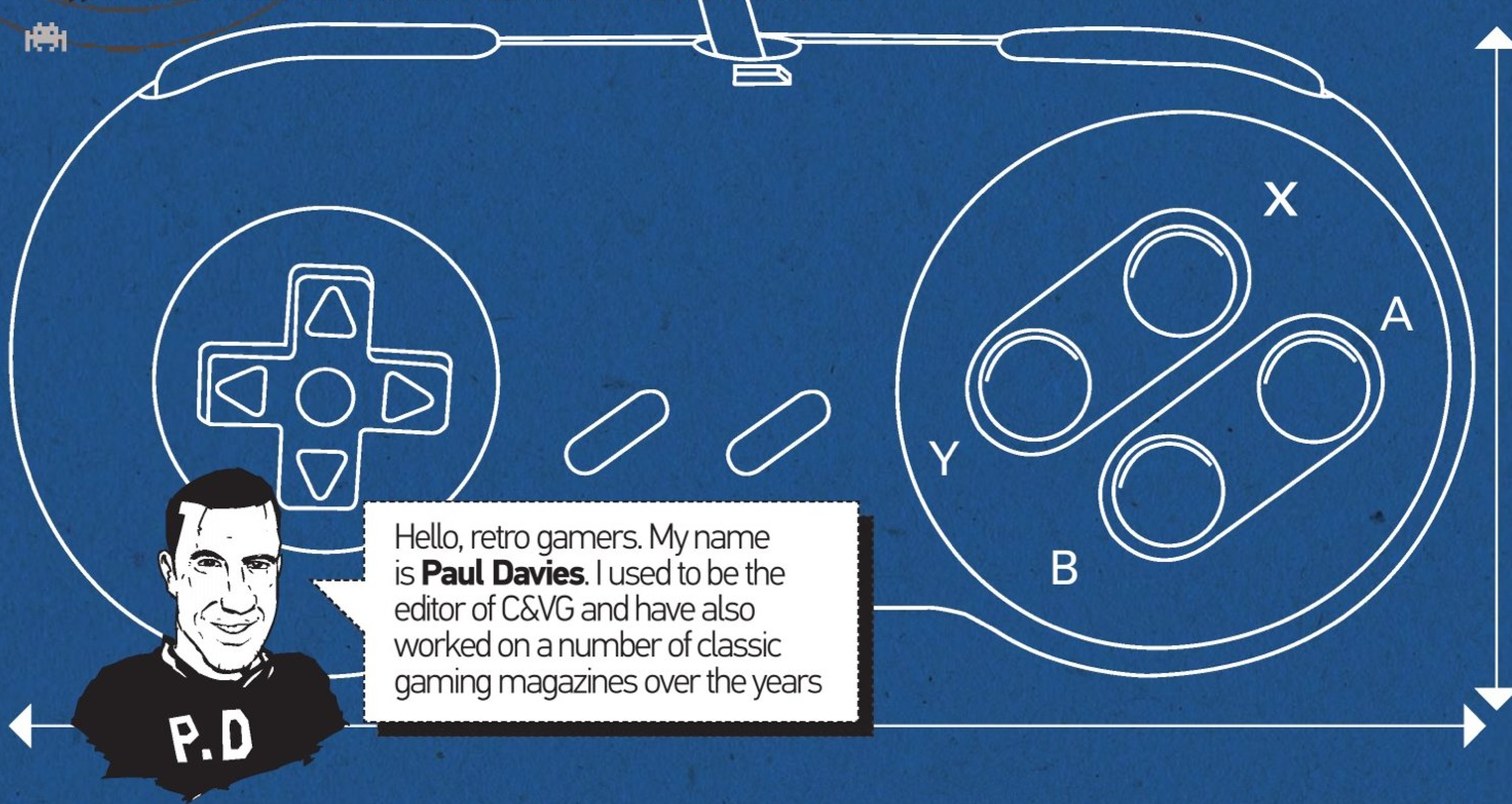
Following the news that *Missile Command* might be getting turned into a movie, this month's tinsel town rumour is that Ron Howard may be partnering up with producer David Koepp to bring *Spy vs. Spy* to the silver screen. Originating as a comic in *Mad* magazine, before being adapted to a videogame by First Star Software, we're excited at the prospect of seeing these two spies clash on the big screen.

Special thanks to reader Ian Robson, for giving us the heads up

retrocolumns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



Never Mind the Slowdown

Arcade graphics, more colours than Mega Drive, Mode 7 and the best controller ever made. The Super NES didn't need a tough-guy ad campaign.

Given the ease with which my fingers now flash between face buttons, shoulder buttons, triggers and analogue sticks to play most games (even the *FIFA* series), I wish I could go back in time to play *Super Mario World* with the Super Hands I have now. Those L and R buttons were rotten tricky at the time.

I could lie to you that my forefingers fell naturally over the shoulders of the Super NES pad, leaving my thumb to activate jump and shoot. But the truth is that I was used to stabbing at coin-op buttons, so I used my forefinger and middle finger to prod the SNES buttons instead. This was fine for stuff like *Super Contra* and *Smash TV*, but I had a lesson to learn with the arrival of *Street Fighter II*.

Six buttons, whereas the Mega Drive (initially) only had three. The Super NES was Super Serious. By the time *Super Mario Kart* came out, Nintendo basically demanded claw-finger controller kung fu to play the latest games, or suffer the consequences. I sweated buckets trying to land that jetpack in *Pilot Wings*, spinning the Mode 7 world around. But playing *Mario Kart* it was hop around those corners and across that Ghost House shortcut or die. And lo, Super Hands delivered unto us almost without trying. We just wanted to win.

Quite literally, SNES became the blueprint for a successful games console. Saturn, PlayStation and subsequently Xbox all borrowed the classic SNES controller layout. Dreamcast pads were a little bit unwieldy, but switched shoulder buttons for triggers, so props to SEGA. The original Xbox controller emerged as a SNES pad with the T-Virus. Wrong, wrongity-wrong!

Don't misunderstand me, my mates and I played lots of Mega Drive stuff too, but there was no doubt that Super NES was the luxury option. Mega Drive was fine for EA Sports, but if you wanted the latest from Konami, Capcom, Irem, Hudson, you name it, SNES was the VIP lounge.

RG has the Collector's Guide to SNES running this issue. A mate of mine still has the *Star Fox Challenge* cartridge somewhere. I wonder how much that's worth? Doesn't come in a box though, it's a very small PCB with a sticker on it from what I recall. But that reminds me that the Japanese Super NES (Super Famicom) had the best boxes ever: tiny plastic trays to hold the cartridge, quite often a full-colour fold-out map or moves list, glossy instruction manuals packed with artwork. Opening a Super Famicom game was loads better than prizing open a plastic Mega Drive case.

I've still got my old Super Famicom in the attic. Actually a new/old one, because my original one from 1991 had onion soup dropped all over it. It worked for a while, smelling of onions, but gave up the ghost after leaving it on all day to do auto-battles on *Dragon Quest VI*. I've got all my old boxes too, pristine if anyone's interested?

Xbox 360 has replaced SNES as my favourite console of all time, but I'll always remember SNES as the godfather.

> Those L and R buttons were rotten tricky at the time





"GONNA TAKE YOU FOR A RIDE"



CAPCOM ANNOUNCES ULTIMATE MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 3

This year's San Diego Comic-Con provided the stage for Capcom to announce that it will be releasing an update to *Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate Of Two Worlds* this November.

Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3, which is sounding like a definitive edition of sorts, will include all 36 characters from the standard game, as well as 12 new playable fighters to expand the full roster to a very respectable 48.

Artwork for the 12 new characters was recently leaked online and revealed Marvel's Ghost Rider, Hawkeye, Rocket Raccoon, Nova, Iron Fist and Doctor Strange to be joining the fray, while the new faces of Capcom would include *Ghosts N' Goblins*' Firebrand, *Dead Rising*'s Frank West, *Resident Evil*'s Nemesis, ace attorney Phoenix Wright, *Devil May Cry*'s Vergil and Strider Hiryu.

In addition to a dozen new fighters, *Ultimate* will feature eight new stages and refreshed HUD and menu screens, and will make a number of tweaks and refinements to the gameplay, including many of the returning characters getting overhauled and made to feel slightly better balanced. The latter is a problem that, for inherent reasons – diverse characters, overblown moves and combos, player freedom in who to team up – has always been a bit of an issue for the series.

However, Capcom's decision to release *Ultimate* on disc, rather than go down the opt-in/opt-out DLC route, as it recently did with *Super Street Fighter IV Arcade Edition*, has been met by sounds of dissent by many fans. Some are branding the move as a bit of a cynical 'comic-con' – see what we did there? – having purchased *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* back in February and now been left upset by the fact that, in a few months, they'll be left with no alternative but to drop another slab of cash on the series to ensure that they don't get left behind.

Speaking to the website Destructoid, *MVC3*'s producer, Ryota Niitsuma, explained that the tragic and devastating earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan early this year was a strong factor in the decision.

"After the release of *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*, there were plans to release DLC," he said. "But, as you know, less than a month after the game was released we had the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. That had an impact on everything, and it threw off our whole development schedule. We decided that instead of doing the DLC we could put it all together in one package, add some additional stuff to make it robust, and deliver it as a disc."

Niitsuma also estimated that around half of the content in *Ultimate* was originally planned for *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*, news that we're sure will upset disgruntled fans even further.

Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3 is scheduled to be released on 25 November and will retail at a reduced price of £29.99. *



» [PS3] Since learning that Strider will be appearing, Darran has been counting down the seconds until *Ultimate*'s release.

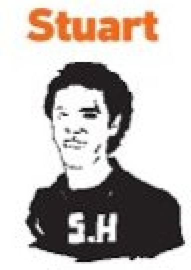
* WHAT WE THINK

Darran



My head is saying this is a cynical marketing move from Capcom. My heart is telling me Strider, Strider!

Stuart



I really like the new character line-up, but given that *MVC3* is only a few months old I understand why many fans feel let down. These days, DLC is pretty much par for the course for triple-A releases, and a great way to make enjoyment of a game stretch that little bit further.

David

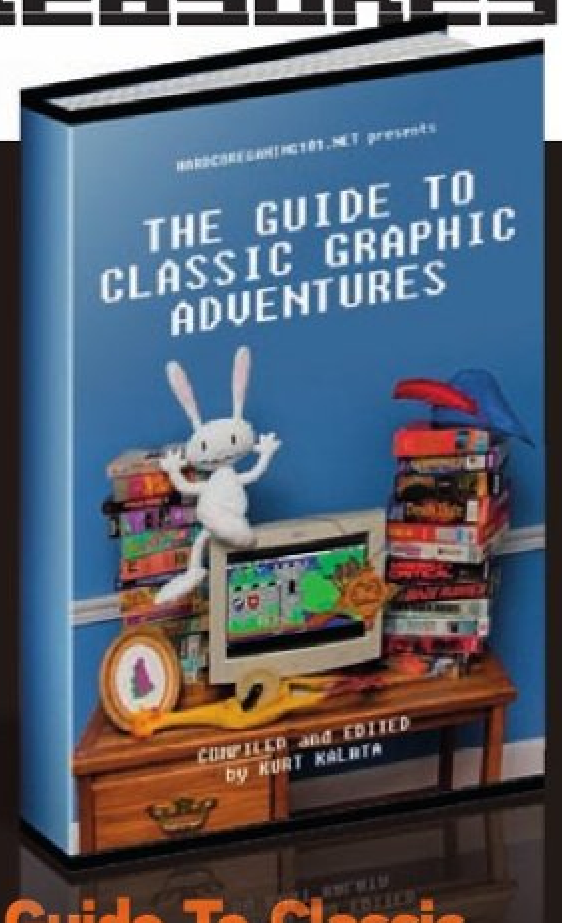


With Ghost Rider making an appearance, it's certainly fired up my imagination, and there's no doubting that bringing such a fantastic roster of characters together in one game could see it ruling the genre with an iron fist.

THE VAULT

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO CHEST

TREASURE OF THE MONTH



The Guide To Classic Graphic Adventures

- **RRP:** £19.50
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

Hardcoregaming101.net is one of the best retro sites around, so any book created by its team is certainly going to be worth a read. Kurt Kalata's *The Guide To Classic Graphic Adventures* certainly doesn't disappoint, even if the title itself is something of a misnomer (a number of text adventures are actually included for completion's sake).

Hardcoregaming101 always prides itself on its exhaustive, in-depth articles and Kalata's book is no different. Huge in its scope (it was originally delayed by six months due to Kalata continually improving its content) it leaves virtually no stone unturned in order to give a definitive guide into one of gaming's longest running genres.

Predominantly focusing on the works of Sierra On-Line and LucasArts, which makes up over a third of Kalata's entire tome, it soon shifts to the work of lesser known (but just as important) publishers and developers within the genre such as Legend Entertainment, Cyberdreams and Dynabyte.

There aren't as many interviews as we'd like, and the US focus means that only the best-known European games are included, but there's no denying Kalata's knowledge and commitment to a subject he's clearly passionate about. Here's hoping that his talented team turn their attention to other genres in the future.

Retro Cassette iPhone Cover

- **RRP:** £12.99
- **But it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

The iPhone is one of the greatest mobile creations of all time, but this new product from Thumbs Up makes it even better. It's an old C90-styled cassette case that looks terribly authentic, the only thing missing is its spools and tape. Simply pop your iPhone 4 inside and it will not only be instantly protected, but will fool those of low intellect into thinking you have a magical cassette that plays far more music than its 90 minutes running time would suggest. Best of all, the cover flips around so you can use it as a handy stand. Brilliant.



Retro NES USB Controller

- **RRP:** $29.99
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



Even though its corners would constantly dig into our hands after long play sessions of *Super Mario Bros*, we still loved the NES's joypad. It's now possible to experience the ergonomically incorrect pad all over again, thanks to chaps at Retro Link. The plug-and-play USB controller is perfect for emulators and is neigh-on indistinguishable from the real deal. Just don't try plugging the device into an actual NES. It will only end in tears. The price tag is a little hefty, but this remains a great alternative to the real thing.

Salamander T-Shirt

- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

Maybe it's because we've been playing lots of *Parodius* and *Galaga* this issue, or perhaps it's just because it looks awesome, but we absolutely adore this T-shirt from Retro GT. Ridiculously stylish and featuring a climatic showdown with one of *Salamander*'s memorable bosses, it's a gorgeous looking T-shirt that won't fail to impress. Available in five sizes and eight colours, it's an achingly stylish piece of clothing that will make even the geekiest loner impossibly cool.





A MOMENT WITH... DUNCAN JONES

In this special edition of A Moment With, film director Duncan Jones shares his retro gaming thoughts and memories

Who is Duncan Jones?

Duncan is the director of the sci-fi films, *Moon* and, most recently, *Source Code*. He is also the son of one of the most iconic rock stars of all-time, David Bowie. On top of that, Duncan has a deep appreciation for retro gaming and technology of all sorts.

As a filmmaker, do you think a great videogame film will ever be made?
I absolutely think a great videogame film can and will be made. The inspiration for a good movie can be just about anything. Really it's just about finding the key element of drama, an interesting setting, a fascinating character that can lead to an engaging story, and games have a plethora of these. It can be done, and I think there are many games that have great source material; but really it's going to take a combination of great writer, inspired director, and a franchise owner who is willing to let go enough to allow what needs to be done, to be done.

What are your top five classic games?
The game that first tapped my imagination like nothing I had experienced before was Richard Garriott's *Ultima III: Exodus* on the Commodore 64. That was the game that first motivated me to buy a ring binder and a stack of graph paper, to draw pixel accurate maps and lists of reagent costs. After that game, I was Lord British's subject, and Origin Software was my church. Garriott was a genius.

For sheer arcade fun, the Amiga served up an amazing array of titles, but I'm going to pick out a few for my top five list. The Bitmap Brothers' fantastic *Speedball 2*, and the equally amazing movie-style games from Cinemaware, *It Came from the Desert* and *TV Sports Football*. Cinemaware was doing something here that modern sports games have completely lost sight of; they were having fun with the sport!

What was your system/computer of choice back in the day and why?
Had a few, but the real stand-out was the Commodore Amiga. Amazing colour, stunning sound, cool design.

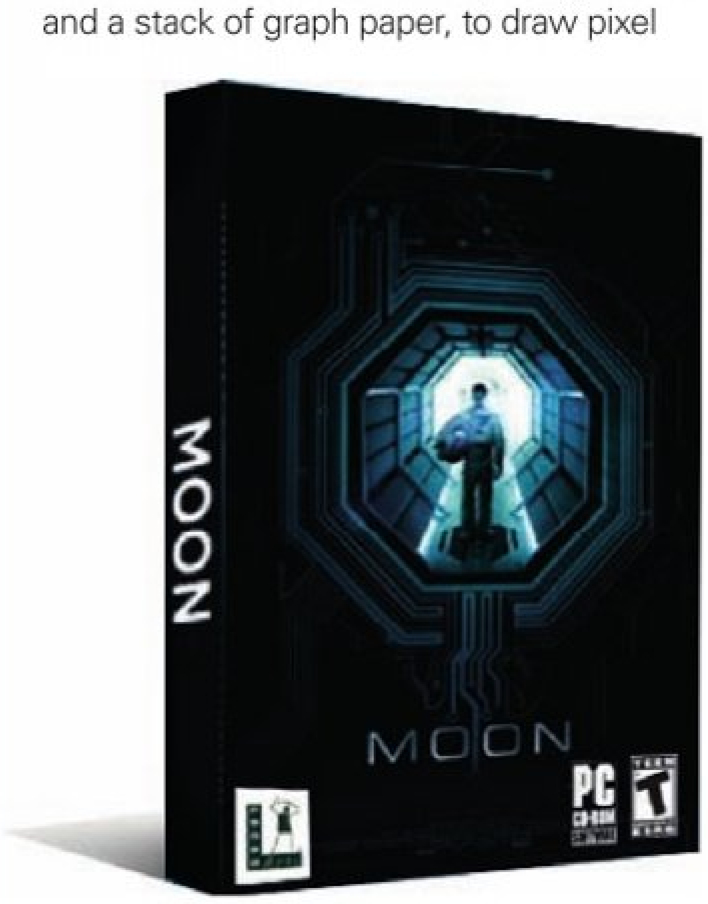
Apart from the obvious, what do you think is the biggest difference between today's great games and the great games of yesteryear?
Humour and surprise. Like the Spanish inquisition! Old games used to be less corporate... they were less afraid, less rigid. Also, because they were being made by small teams of really passionate people, and not by squadrons of corporate producers, they had a whimsy to them that we have really lost. And it really is a loss. That whimsy is something I really do miss. Come back Origin & Sierra... come back Cinemaware and LucasArts.



» [Amiga] Slay that big beastie!

> "I absolutely think a great videogame film can and will be made"







» [Amiga] It's always good to score a goal!

If you had a crack at making your own game, what kind of game would it be?
Probably something retro! Seriously. I think I would try to distil the best memories I have in games into a small, tightly made package that could be played on an iPad, phone or browser... and if that went well, I would go for a great big fuck-off RPG sprawler, like Richard Garriott made!

I don't know if you've seen the mock up of *Moon* as a classic LucasArts adventure game, but what are your thoughts on it?
Brilliant bit of work that has definitely not gone unnoticed.

What is your favourite videogame theme song/musical score and why?
For sheer 'put a smile on my face-edness' I have to give it to the Wanderer from *Ultima III*. Ahhh, memories...

Did you ever get a chance to play any games with your father?
Nope. Was never his bag. *

19 August – 15 September

retrodiary

» A month of retro events both past and present



19 August 1985
Level 9 Computing releases its latest graphic adventure, *Red Moon*, on Spectrum and Commodore 64.



20 August 1993
Infocom releases *Return To Zork*, its first *Zork* game to feature point and click control rather than text entry.



24 August 2007
2K Games finally releases the superb survival horror FPS, *BioShock*, in Europe. Reviews are a resoundingly positive.



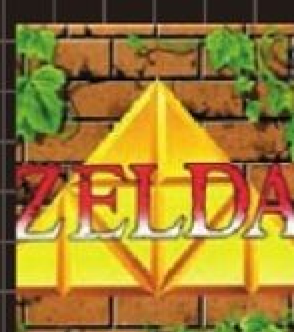
25 August 1983
Acorn reveals its new home micro, the Electron, at the Acorn User Show.



25 August 1995
Namco releases the second instalment of *Tekken*, its highly regarded beat-'em-up, in the arcades.



26 August 1985
Peter Harrap and Gremlin Graphics releases the Spectrum platform game classic, *Monty On The Run*.



28 August 1989
Nintendo releases *Zelda* on the Game & Watch handheld.

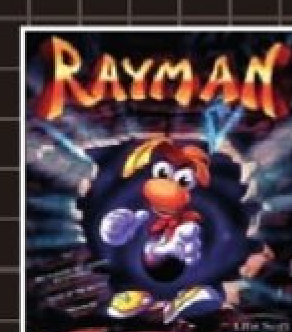


30 August 1987
Capcom releases *Street Fighter* in arcades across the land. Hadouken!

30 August 2004
Acclaim, the American games publisher, is declared bankrupt. Amongst its back catalogue are classics such as *Burnout* and *Turok*.



31 August 1996
Crash Bandicoot makes his debut on the PlayStation. It becomes one of the best selling games on the system.



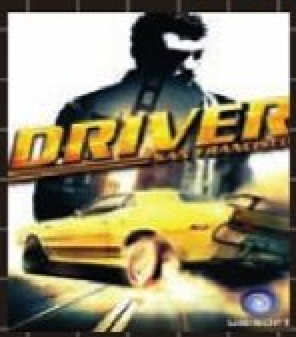
1 September 1995
French software house Ubisoft releases *Rayman* on the PlayStation, and he becomes the mascot for the company.



1 September 1986
Sega releases its perennial racing favourite *OutRun* onto the arcade dwelling public. Magical Sound Shower anyone?



1 September 2005
Sony's PlayStation Portable (PSP) makes its UK debut.



2 September 2011
The PS3 and Xbox 360 versions of *Driver: San Francisco*, the sandbox game from Ubisoft, is pencilled in for its UK release.



6 September 1993
The 3DO console is releases in the USA, but fails to ignite gamer's interests, and is far too expensive…



9 September 1999
Sega's overlooked console, the Dreamcast, makes its worldwide debut in the US.



9 September 2011
The anticipated *Star Fox 64 3D* on the Nintendo 3DS sees the continuing adventures of Fox McCloud when it arrives in the UK.



10 September 1941
Gunpei Yokoi, the designer behind the Game & Watch and Nintendo Game Boy, is born in Kyoto, Japan.



10 September 2004
Arguably the best game in the series, *Burnout 3: Takedown* debuts in Europe on the PS2 and Xbox.



15 September 2011
New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

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BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



CHARTS

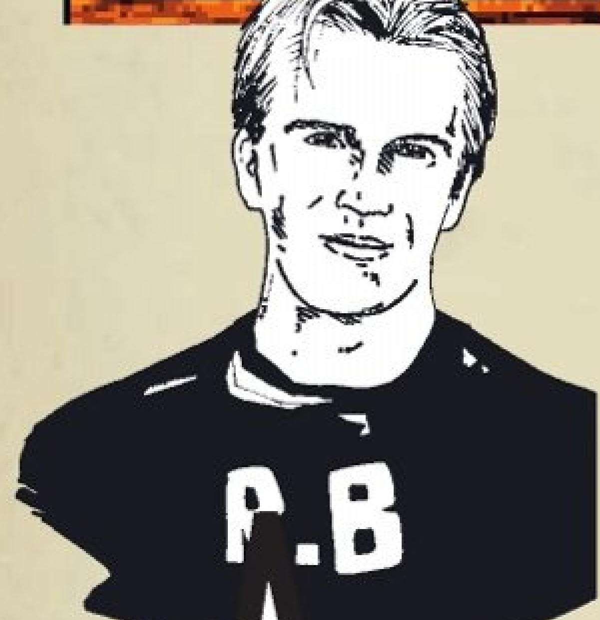
NOVEMBER 1989



COMMODORE 64

1. Crazy Cars (Hit Squad)
2. Green Beret (Hit Squad)
3. Pitstop 2 (Kixx)
4. Enduro Racer (Hit Squad)
5. RoboCop (Ocean)





THE LATEST NEWS FROM NOVEMBER 1989

NOVEMBER 1989 – Gazza misses, Moonwalker divides opinion, Woakes goes Mercenary again, PC Engine Plus causes NEC pain, Amstrad's GX4000 arrives, Last Ninja has last outing and Level 9 says bye. Richard Burton goes E, SE, N, E and still ends up at the start…

Empire revealed that it was treading the well-worn path of football-endorsed games by releasing *Gazza's Super Soccer* on the Spectrum, featuring the then-Tottenham star Paul Gascoigne. Rumours that it would feature oddities such as pie-eating and a professional blubbing simulator were unfounded, which was a shame as it would have livened up what was a poor substitute for most other football games.

However, it did manage a unique option: the ability to save your custom-built squad and league and load it into another Spectrum… or C64 or Amstrad. It was inspired, but totally wasted on such an insipid offering. And to wheel out the old cliché of football being a game of two halves, Empire later released *Gazza II*, which was more of the same but vastly improved over the original.

Due out this month from US Gold was a game based on the Michael Jackson movie *Moonwalker*. With the movie receiving mixed reviews, accused of being a mishmash of animation and music videos and having no discernable direction, the game already looked doomed. When released, it was a four-level affair influenced by such gaming luminaries as *Gauntlet*, *Pac-Man* and *Operation Wolf*, which saw MJ attempting to save his friends from Mr Big and his nefarious henchmen. It all sounded like a terrible mix of genres, but somehow managed to be oddly playable.

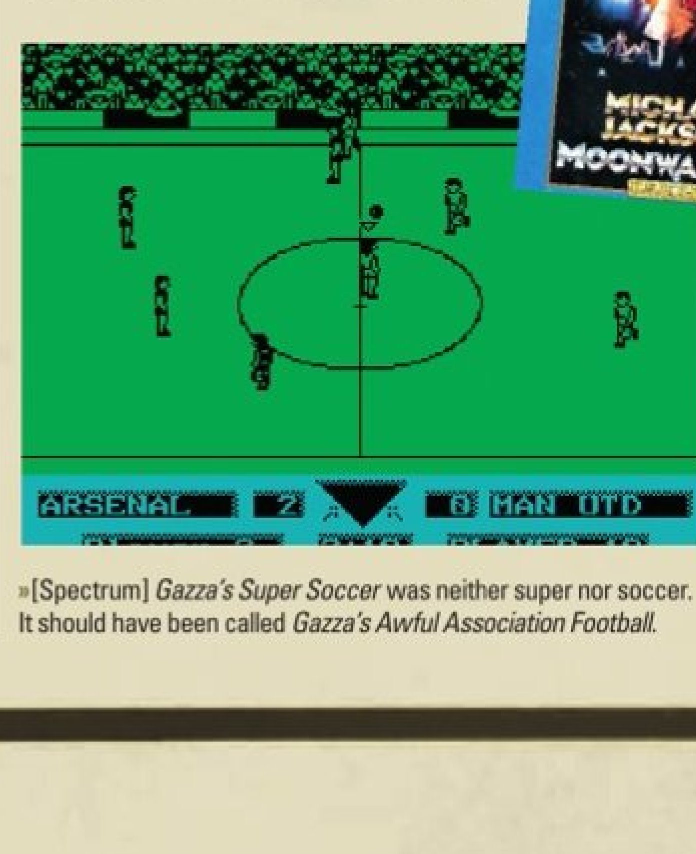
A Paul Woakes/Novagen release was always keenly awaited, so cue celebrations as finally *Damocles: Mercenary II* was ready for Christmas after a lingering period of development. After escaping Targ in the first game, you headed of to a comet called Damocles that was threatening to destroy the planet Eris. Much puzzlement, adventuring and galactic exploration ensued and, once again, it was all done beautifully. Sadly, 8-bit computer owners missed out as it was only released on PC, ST and Amiga.

Two of the biggest releases intended for the Christmas sales push were both coin-ops and both had much promise. US Gold was ready to release Capcom's *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, the sequel to *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, while Ocean Software was countering with its own sequel, *Operation Thunderbolt*, the follow-up to the top-selling *Operation Wolf*. Fortunately for gamers, both were solid conversions across all 8 and 16-bit formats.

There was good news for fans of the PC Engine in the UK, as a small company, the overly wordy Mention And Active Sales & Marketing, was letting it be known that it was producing something called the PC Engine Plus.

With the PC Engine having not made an official UK appearance, and grey imports of the system doing rather well on the sales front, Mention decided to re-engineer the console

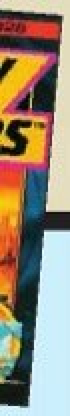


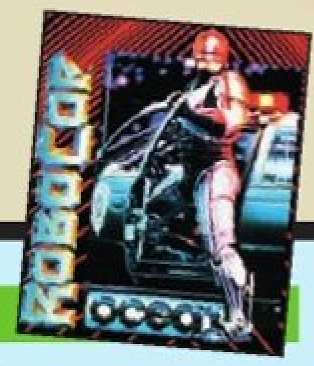


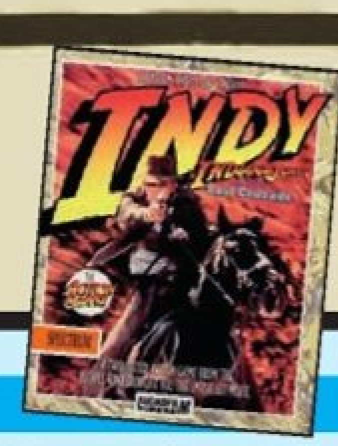
»[Spectrum] *Gazza's Super Soccer* was neither super nor soccer. It should have been called *Gazza's Awful Association Football*.

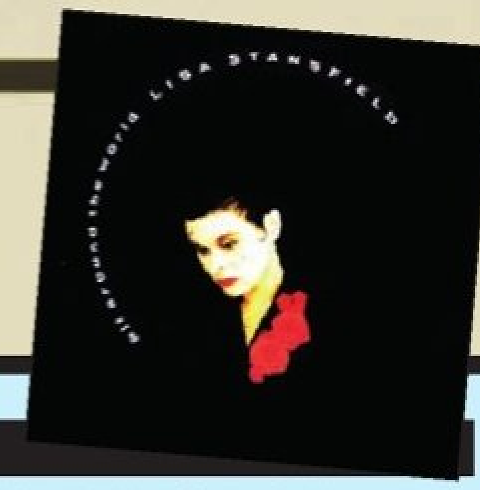


»[Amstrad] *Moonwalker*. Strange game based on a strange film.









AMSTRAD	
1	RoboCop (Ocean)
2	MIG-29 (Codemasters)
3	Twin Turbo V8 (Codemasters)
4	Daley Thompson's Decathlon (Hit Squad)
5	Yie Ar Kung-Fu (Hit Squad)

SPECTRUM	
1	Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade (US Gold)
2	Crazy Cars (Hit Squad)
3	Treasure Island Dizzy (Codemasters)
4	Green Beret (Hit Squad)
5	Postman Pat (Alternative)

MUSIC	
1	All Around The World (Lisa Stansfield)
2	You Got It (New Kids On The Block)
3	Another Day In Paradise (Phil Collins)
4	Don't Know Much (Linda Ronstadt & Aaron Neville)
5	Girl I'm Gonna Miss You (Milli Vanilli)

NOVEMBER 1989 NEWS

9 November saw the fall of the Berlin Wall. The 28-mile-long wall had been built in 1961 to prevent mass emigration from East Germany to West Germany. The first sign that change was occurring was earlier in the day when a spokesman for the East Berlin Communist Party announced that East Germans would be allowed to travel to the West through checkpoints. Previously, anyone risking an unofficial visit would gamble their lives against armed border guards.

Later, gates along the wall were opened and celebrations started. Some climbed on the wall while others took to small-scale demolition and souvenir-hunting with sledgehammers. The unification of Germany followed.

21 November brought with it the first televised proceedings in the House of Commons, with the state opening of Parliament and Conservative MP, Ian Gow, the first to make a televised speech. Order, order!



» *The Toxic Avenger* is back, and even for Troma this was bad.

Back To The Future Part II, starring Michael J. Fox in more DeLorean-based time travel shenanigans, premiered in the UK on 24 November. This was preceded, however, on 10 November by a slightly less impressive world premiere: *The Toxic Avenger III: The Last Temptation Of Toxie*. After completing work on the second *Toxic Avenger* movie, released earlier in the year, Troma Entertainment and director Lloyd Kaufman realised that they had filmed far too much footage, and pieced together old footage with newly shot scenes to create a third instalment.

so that the power supply was consistent. The ones that came with the grey imports were often unreliable and, left unchecked, a supply kicking out more voltage than required would eventually cause the regulator to overheat, and it would be downhill from there. Mention also altered the PC Engine so that the TV output was changed from NTSC to PAL.

Unfortunately, Mention forgot to mention that it hadn't received permission from NEC to start modifying its console. Once the Japanese giant caught wind of the unofficial alterations, the project was swiftly pulled, with NEC later confirming that it felt the UK console market was already saturated and that releasing either incarnation of the PC Engine just wouldn't be profitable. Bummer.

However, there was good news for console fans, with a new machine announced. The bad news was it was the Amstrad GX4000. Amstrad had also announced its new CPC Plus range of computers, which would similarly incorporate a cartridge slot to play the console games.

The GX4000 was launched in the spring of 1990, priced at £99, and came with the pack-in game *Burnin' Rubber*. It immediately bombed. With little software support and minuscule sales, retailers were forced to drop the price of the console within weeks, some as low as £29. Strangely, that lack of software now makes some of the GX4000 games highly collectable today. A few months back, *Chase HQ II* sold on eBay for £906…

System 3 was ready to give *The Last Ninja* one more outing, with the third instalment under development. The C64 version would be a cartridge-only release at the chunky price of £24.99. An Amiga conversion followed, released eventually in spring 1991.

Level 9 Computing, master of text and graphic adventuring since 1981, finally decided to call it day with its last adventure, *Scapeghost*, released across several 8-bit and 16-bit formats. Fittingly, it was a cracking farewell for a company that had consistently produced adventuring excellence through the formative 8-bit years.

»[Amstrad] *Scapeghost* was the last adventure from the always-consistent Level 9 Computing.



»[Commodore 64] Whether it be *Fatman* or *Mondu*, one thing is certain: the guy loves his moobs.



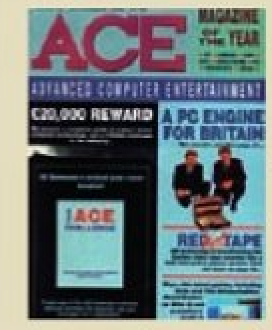


Oddest release of the month would surely go to *Tongue Of The Fatman* by Activision. It adopted the more routine title of *Mondu's Fight Palace* for the UK, but it was still one bizarre game. Despite being substandard fighting fare, the elaborate storyline and weird characters helped get it noticed in an overcrowded genre. Then there's the Fatman, who you aimed to defeat in the final battle. The porky lardster had a secret weapon: a belly that opened up to reveal a giant attacking tongue. Mondo bizarro.

Computer & Video Games reviewers were putting in the hours, with a host of pre-Christmas releases vying for your attention. They thought your dinner money should have been spent on *Power Drift* (Activision, Amiga), *Continental Circus* (Virgin/Mastertronic, Atari ST), *Batman* (Ocean, Amiga), *The Untouchables* (Ocean, Spectrum), *Contact* (Rainbird, Atari ST), *Turbo Esprit* (Encore, Spectrum), *M1 Tank* (MicroProse, PC), *Boxxle* (FCI, Game Boy) and the top-selling pair of *Tetris* and *Super Mario Land* (both Nintendo, Game Boy).

THIS MONTH IN…

ACE



ACE featured an interview with David Braben of *Elite* fame, who talked about the future of gaming. He thought companies touting interactive-movie games were being far too premature with their inflated claims, and that the 3D polygon style was about to fall out of favour.



ZERO



The first issue of the magazine *Zero* saw an interview with coder Alan Tomkins. He discussed how he got his foot in the door by demoing some graphics work at the Silica Shop in Selfridges. Freelance work followed for Probe Software, on conversions such as *OutRun*.



AMSTRAD COMPUTER USER



ACU talked to Domark founders Dominic Wheatley and Mark Strachan. Surprisingly, neither had much background in computing. Wheatley was a former Irish Guard and Strachan worked in brewery management.



BACK TO THE NINETIES



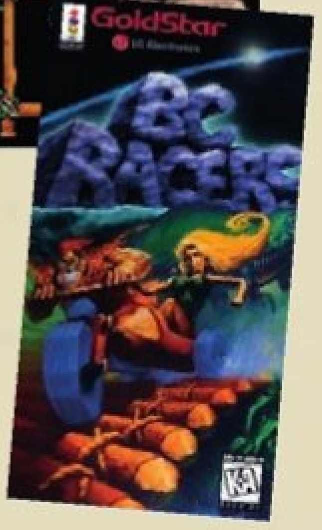
»[SNES] The sequel to *Rocket Knight Adventures, Sparkster* was two completely different yet excellent games on the SNES and Mega Drive.



»[Amiga] Never one to duck out of a licensing deal, US Gold once again ducked out of making a decent football game.



»[3DO] *BC Racers* was another game attempting to follow in the skid marks of *Super Mario Kart*.



APRIL 1994 – Commodore is dead, Disney's Lion King is a roaring success, Sonic goes speeding, Rocket Knight returns (twice) and US Gold does US World Cup. Richard Burton is thankful it's a game of two halves, not four quarters…

THE LATEST NEWS FROM APRIL 1994

April 1994 marked the passing of one of the biggest names in home computing, Commodore. Having fought off financial difficulties for months, the company was declared bankrupt with all its assets liquidated.

Commodore had pinned its survival hopes on its CD32 console, which had only been released eight months earlier. Despite selling relatively well – initial sales of around 100,000 were reported – it wasn't enough to pull it back into financial security.

German computer company Escom later bought the Commodore name for $14 million and rapidly expanded the company in the UK, buying many of the store locations formerly used by Rumbelows, the defunct electrical retailer. However, Escom expanded too quickly, made huge losses and was itself declared bankrupt July 1996.

Oddly, in the same month that Commodore went under, figures from Gallup, the software chart compilers, showed a sharp increase in sales of CD32 software, making it the biggest-selling CD format software of any system, including the Mega-CD and PC CD-ROM.

Disney and Virgin Games were set to collaborate once again, no doubt inspired by the terrific sales of their last partnership, *Aladdin*. The next Disney movie to become a videogame was *The Lion King*, due to be released in cinemas in June.

The side-scrolling platform game would follow the life journey of Simba from cub into adulthood and do battle with his evil uncle Scar, with two bonus levels featuring the movie's comedic element of Timon and Pumbaa.

As with *Aladdin*, Disney's own animation team were responsible for the sprites and backgrounds, which gave both games their distinct Disney feel. *The Lion King* was released on all popular console systems and proved to be a success, as was the movie when it was eventually released in time for Christmas 1994. The only criticism the game received was that the difficulty level was set too high, possibly in response to opinion that *Aladdin* was too easy.

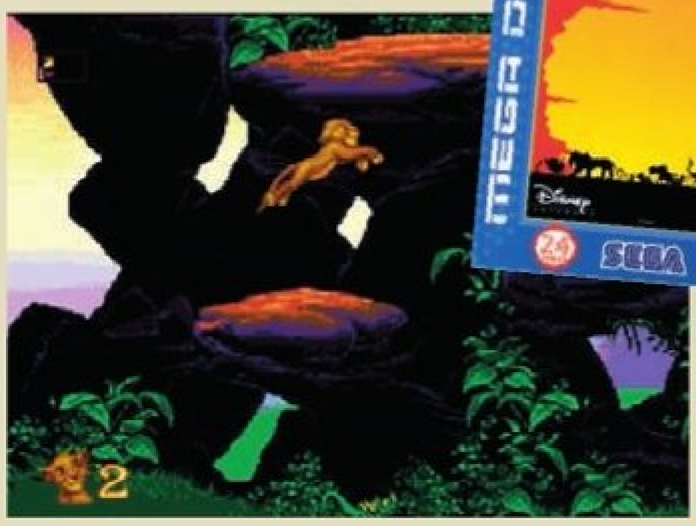
Sonic The Hedgehog was back once again, but this time he's hoping to out-kart *Mario* in his new game. *Sonic Drift* was a *Super Mario Kart*-styled affair released exclusively on the Sega Game Gear. It featured the usual mix of pretty tracks, collecting rings and power-ups in an attempt to win back the Chaos Emeralds from Dr Robotnik.

It didn't need a rocket scientist to see that Sega was hoping to cash in on the huge success of *Mario Kart*, which was still riding high in the software charts. Despite being a playable and fun title, *Sonic Drift* was never going to put a dent into the *Mario Kart* bandwagon, although sales suggested that it had sold well enough to warrant a sequel a year later.

Also with eyes on the bottom line, as well as the finishing line, was Core Design,



»[Game Gear] *Sonic* follows *Mario* into karting with *Sonic Drift*, but was restricted to appearing only on the Game Gear.



»[Mega Drive] 'Hakuna matata' roughly translated means 'a nailed-on dead-cert success for Disney and Virgin'.



APRIL 1994 NEWS

Kurt Cobain, lead singer of Seattle grunge rock band Nirvana, was found dead on 5 April. Cobain, a sufferer of bipolar disorder who had also battled drug addiction, was aged just 27 when he committed suicide by shooting himself.

22 April saw more death with the passing of former US president Richard Nixon at the age of 81, from complications of a stroke. Nixon would be remembered for being the only US president to ever resign his position after being implicated in the Watergate conspiracy, in which five men broke into the Watergate Hotel to place wire-tapping equipment in the Democratic headquarters situated in the complex.

30 April completed a sad trio of deaths when Austrian Formula 1 racing driving Roland Ratzenberger was killed in qualifying for the San Marino Grand Prix at the Imola circuit. It was only the third F1 race he had ever driven in. The lap prior to his fatal crash saw Ratzenberger leave the track causing damage to his front wing. Instead of coming into the pit lane to replace the wing, he continued to race for the final spot on the grid. On a high-speed straight, the wing broke off and lodged under the chassis. Ratzenberger couldn't control the car and he crashed into a concrete wall at just over 195mph.



»Lead singer of Nirvana, Kurt Cobain, died aged just 27.

As sad an event as that was, the biggest and most shocking Formula 1 death was a mere 24 hours away…

which had much the same idea as Sega by announcing *BC Racers*, a prehistoric-themed kart racing game featuring the characters from its hit *Chuck Rock* games. Core initially released a Sega Mega-CD version later in the year, with further conversions for the 3DO, Sega 32X and PC. Apart from the woeful 32X port, the other versions were surprisingly playable. Still not a patch on *Super Mario Kart*, however…

With the 1994 football World Cup finals looming, the influx of football-related games was ever-increasing. However, there can only be one official FIFA-endorsed product, and US Gold had bagged the honour of producing a game worthy of the event.

With US Gold having brought us the travesty known as *World Cup Carnival* in 1986, the re-packaging of Artic's simplistic 1984 release, it was hoped that it would do a considerably better job this time around.

With versions available across Sega and Nintendo formats as well as PC and Amiga, US Gold managed to create something that was just a hair's breadth of an improvement over its 1986 offering. *World Cup USA 94* was a stinker.

A surprise hit at the time was Konami's hugely entertaining *Rocket Knight Adventures* on the Mega Drive. Despite starring a cutesy lead character and being yet another platformer, the game won over many with its slick graphics and fast gameplay.

Konami decided the time was right to unveil *Sparkster: Rocket Knight Adventures 2*… twice. *Sparkster* was to be released on the Mega Drive and SNES for the first time – a SNES version of the first game had been planned but pulled – but with surprising news that both games would be completely different. The Mega Drive version would be a continuation of the story from the first game, while the SNES effort would be a standalone game in its own right with new levels, enemies and gameplay structure. Thankfully for all concerned, both games turned out to be terrific in their own right, with the SNES version arguably edging out the Mega Drive version as the better game.

Mean Machines Sega was in a less than generous mood, giving high marks to just a handful of games: *The Chaos Engine* (MicroProse, Mega Drive), *PGA European Tour* (Electronic Arts, Mega Drive), *Dracula Unleashed* (Infocom, Mega-CD), *Prince Of Persia* (Domark, Mega-CD) and *Columns III* (Vic Tokai, Mega Drive).

Super Play was equally stringent, with *Super Puyo Puyo* (Banpresto), *The Chaos Engine* (Spectrum Holobyte), *Tetris Battle Gaiden* (Bullet Proof Software), *Choplifter 3* (Ocean), *Metal Marines* (Mindscape) and *Soccer Kid* (Ocean).

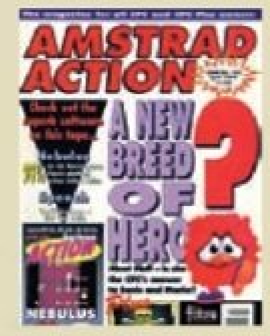
Meanwhile, Amiga gamers were given the lowdown by *Amiga Force* on: *Naughty Ones* (Interactivision), *HeroQuest II: Legacy Of Sorasil* (Gremlin Graphics), *Perihelion* (Psygnosis), *Fly Harder* (Krisalis, CD32), *Second Samurai* (Psygnosis), *Liberation* (Mindscape) and Powermonger (Bullfrog).




»[Amiga] *Perihelion* was an atmospheric RPG with some fantastic graphics, but sadly slipped from gamers' memories.

THIS MONTH IN…

AMSTRAD ACTION



8-bit home micros were long in the tooth come 1994, but *AA* featured a problem that lives on: the software backup device such as the Multiface. Linked to software piracy, several software houses were asked what they thought of them. No prize for guessing their answers.



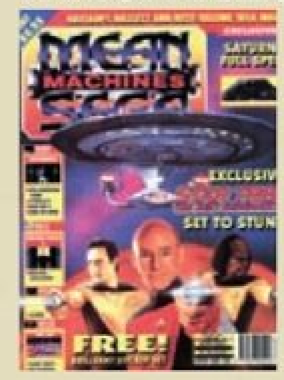
SUPER PLAY



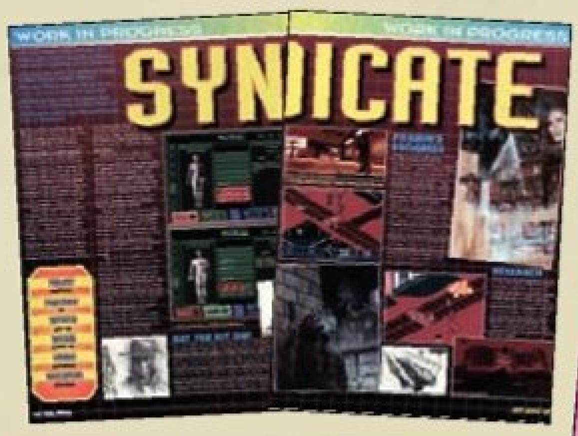
Furrowed brows and seriousness were in abundance in *Super Play* as Bullfrog and Virgin Games, developers of Syndicate and Cannon Fodder respectively, discussed the problems of Nintendo's strict 'family values' policy and how it has affected their excellent yet violent conversions.



MEAN MACHINES SEGA

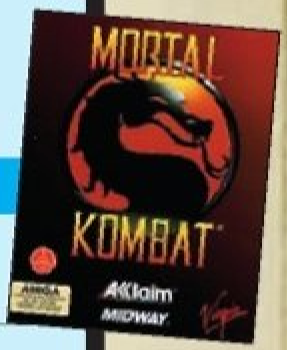


MMS featured more *Syndicate*. Bullfrog admitted that previous console successes, *Powermonger* and *Populous*, were not suited to consoles. So Syndicate was to be its first made for consoles rather than a PC port.



CHARTS

APRIL 1994



AMIGA

1. Mortal Kombat (Acclaim)
2. Cannon Fodder (Virgin Games)
3. Frontier: Elite II (Gametek)
4. The Settlers (Blue Byte)
5. Zool 2 (Gremlin Graphics)



SNES

1. Super Mario Kart (Nintendo)
2. Aladdin (Capcom)
3. Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles: Tournament Fighters (Konami)
4. Super Mario All-Stars (Nintendo)
5. Jurassic Park (Ocean)

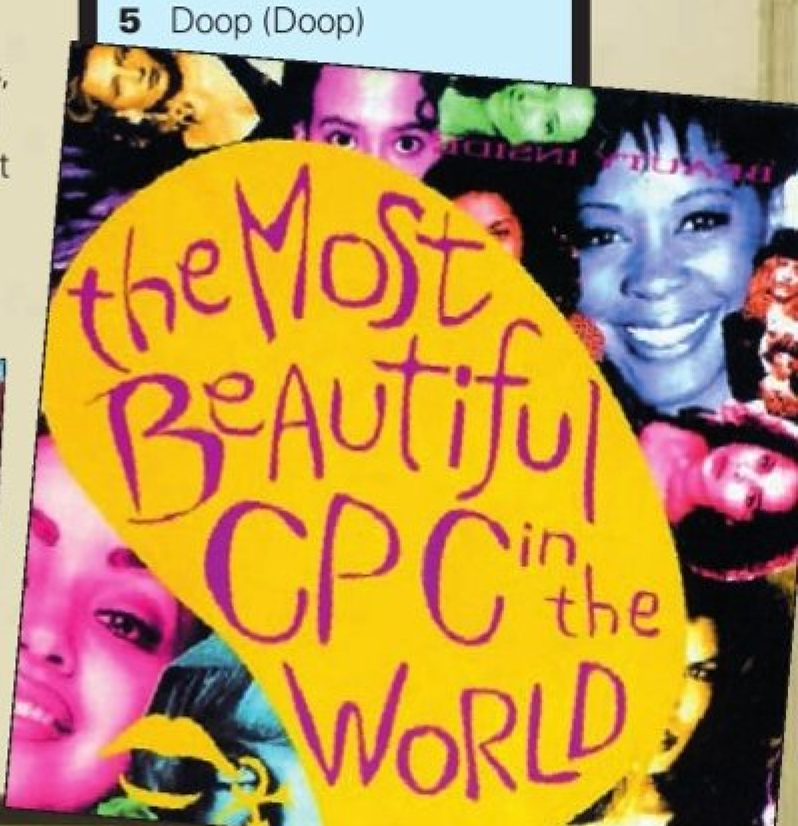


COMMODORE 64

1. Street Fighter II (US Gold)
2. WWF European Rampage (Ocean)
3. Jack Nicklaus Greatest 18 Holes Of Major Championship Golf (Hit Squad)
4. Street Fighter (Kixx)
5. Final Fight (Kixx)

MUSIC

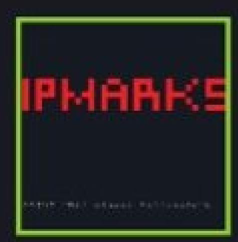
1. The Most Beautiful Girl In The World (Prince)
2. Everything Changes (Take That)
3. Streets Of Philadelphia (Bruce Springsteen)
4. The Real Thing (Tony Di Bart)
5. Doop (Doop)



Cuthbert In The Jungle

A DRAGON DOES A BRILLIANT ATARI 2600 IMPRESSION

#41



» DRAGON 32/64
» MICRODEAL
» 1983

I had a friend in the Eighties and he owned a Dragon… because of this, everyone felt sorry for him, and offered encouraging words. We sniggered behind his back because he had a crap Welsh computer and we had English Sinclairs and BBCs. We could spend our evenings playing *Knight Lore, Starquake* and *Elite* while pretending to do our homework while all he had was *Dragon Trek*. How we laughed.

Then two games came out that made us green (maybe even Dragon background green) with envy. One was *Donkey King* – a brilliant conversion of an arcade hit (can you guess which one? It's heavily disguised), the other was *Cuthbert In The Jungle* (*Trapfall* to US CoCo owners).

Cuthbert In The Jungle wasn't just a brilliant copy of *Pitfall* by Activision, it actually played slightly better than *Pitfall,* in my opinion. The graphics were brilliantly designed, and the animation smooth and fluid. Also, the Dragon's rather strange analogue joysticks worked well on *Cuthbert* and actually added to the game experience. All the *Pitfall* elements were there: the logs, crocodiles, water, snakes and ladders. It's a truly brilliant game, and so much better than the official port of *Pitfall* on the Spectrum.

There are a couple of problems with *Cuthbert In The Jungle*. Firstly, the name Cuthbert is a completely upper-class twit name. Who on earth is called Cuthbert? Also, people with a name like Cuthbert sound more suited to musical theatre than jungle exploring. Secondly, how on earth did Microdeal think they would get away with such a carbon copy of an existing game?

In truth, they didn't. Activision sued and they had to stop production of the game. I also believe they rebranded the US version as their own version of *Pitfall* on the Tandy computer – I may have just made that bit up though… although, it has happened before.

We all had to eat our humble pie hats and beg my friend to let us play with his micro from Wales. It didn't last, as no other great games were released for the Dragon. However, two years later he bought a Commodore 64 with a disk drive and *Uridium*, so we had to go begging again.



RETROBATE PROFILE

» **NAME:** IAN MARKS
» **JOINED:** 17TH AUG 2008
» **LOCATION:** EAST MIDLANDS
» **OCCUPATION:** NOT GIVEN
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** DRAGON 32

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Computer Space

If you spent your youth hunched over an arcade cabinet blasting aliens, Computer Space is where it all began. Paul Drury talks to Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney about the granddaddy of videogames



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** NUTTING ASSOCIATES
- » **DEVELOPER:** SYZYGY
- » **RELEASED:** 1971
- » **PLATFORMS:** ARCADE
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

It's summer 1966 and a young Nolan Bushnell, sporting sideburns but no bushy beard yet, is strolling through the Lagoon Amusement Park in Farmington, Utah. He's manager of the games department, working there to help pay his way through university. He smiles at the rows of pinball tables and electro-mechanical machines, guzzling coins from eager players.

Back at the University of Utah, Nolan is up late, playing *Spacewar!* in the computer lab into the early hours. The game, created by Steve Russell and friends at MIT in 1962, has two starship commanders locked in a deep space dogfight. It's a big hit on campus. And suddenly, a connection is made…

"I turned to the fraternity brother I was playing against and said: 'This is a great game! We could get people to put a quarter in to play this at Lagoon!'" exclaims Nolan. "I envisioned a row of screens running from a central computer, each with a coin slot. Then we looked around us at this million dollar computer and thought, 'Mmm, we've got a long way to go…'"

It wouldn't be until the next decade that, as co-founder of Atari, Nolan would see his vision of aisles of arcade machines realised. For now, the prohibitive hardware costs – Nolan estimates even the



display screens cost $20,000 – meant his videogame dream would have to wait. He graduated in 1968 and joined Ampex, a prominent American electronics company and pioneer in audio and video technology.

"I'd worked at Ampex for about a year, and as an engineer you get all these trade magazines," explains Nolan. "There was an ad in there that alerted me to the Data General Nova computer. Up to then, minicomputers were like $40,000, and then this comes along for $4,000 and I'm like, 'Woah, this might be good enough!'"

Nolan eagerly sent away for the manuals to this breakthrough machine and began making paper designs for a *Spacewar!* setup with four screens running from a single computer. With four coin slots collecting quarters, he hoped it could earn enough to pay for the high initial hardware costs and become a viable proposition to sell, not to bars, but amusement parks. "I told everyone at Ampex I was working on a videogame," smiles Nolan, "and they all thought I was loony."

Well, not quite everyone. Ted Dabney had joined Ampex in 1961, working in the military products unit for six years before transferring to the Videofile division in Sunnyvale, California. "I shared an office with Nolan and he took me over to Stanford to look at *Spacewar!*," recalls Ted. "I thought it was great… if you had a big enough computer! I didn't know if he was mad or not but I thought it was something worth trying."

Ted and Nolan teamed up with programmer Larry Bryan, who had access to a PDP computer and was to be responsible for the coding, and they began calculating how many games they could run from one computer. "We concluded there was no way it was going to work. It just wasn't fast enough," notes Ted. "Plus Larry never got anywhere with the programming."

"The cycle time of the machines was simply too slow to support multiple screens," agrees Nolan. "Things like drawing the rocket ship still took a lot of computer time. We'd gone down from four, to three, to two screens. An electro-mechanical game cost around $900 and I thought we could charge a little more than that, but not $3,000 a screen! The economic proposition was gone…"

And so the quest to bring videogames into the arcades almost died with the Sixties. Then, at the start of the new decade, there came

> **"I told everyone I was working on a videogame and they all thought I was loony"**
>
> NOLAN HAD THE LAST LAUGH, THOUGH…





» The iconic *Computer Space* flyer. Nolan: "The girl was a topless dancer at a bar called The Brass Rail. It was done by Dave Ralston. We always thought he had a little thing with her but we never knew for sure."



» Former RG editor Martyn Carroll spotted this cabinet at E3 in 2004.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

PONG (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: ARCADE
YEAR: 1972

SPACE RACE
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1973

ISAAC ASIMOV PRESENTS SUPER QUIZ
SYSTEM: ARCADE (CHUCK E CHEESE EXCLUSIVE)
YEAR: 1979

an epiphany. Ironically, a game called *Computer Space* only became a reality when one key component was removed – the computer.

"Nolan's a smart guy and he was dicking around with a TV set, adjusting the vertical and horizontal hold and seeing the picture move," says Ted. "He asked me why that happens. I explained it to him and he said: 'Could we use this?' I said: 'Well, we'd have to do it digitally because with analogue we wouldn't have any control.' I explained we'd need a counter for the sync and one for the video and let the video counter change in respect to the sync counter. He said: 'Could we do that?' I didn't know yet…"

By replacing the expensive computer with circuitry built from cheap electronic components that could display and manipulate images on a standard television screen, the project was suddenly back in business. There was just one problem: the circuitry didn't exist. So, in 1970, Ted moved his daughter out of her bedroom and converted it into a workshop, where he began tinkering with an old telly and off-the-shelf components bought from electronics stores.

"I started by figuring out how to move something on the screen. It took me quite a while but finally I got these counters to do what I wanted them to, so you could change them by one bit and get very slow movement of a little square on the screen or by two bits and get faster movement. The next thing was, well, what are you gonna move? Nolan said: 'We need a rocket ship!'"

The ship you command in your quest to outgun flying saucers intent on your destruction was fashioned from a series of dots, forming the outline of your craft. Each dot you saw on screen corresponded to a discrete diode on a circuit board inside the machine. These were arranged in a matrix, one for each direction the rocket ship could face. "What Nolan did was pretty smart," chuckles Ted. "He created the diode matrix and just before it went into production, he laid it out on the board, in the shape of the actual rocket ship, so if you had a problem, you could easily figure out what part wasn't working properly."

"Rotating the rocket was tricky," adds Nolan, "but the eyeball is quite forgiving. The dots are changing position on a 16x16 matrix and the places you put the dots aren't quite right, but by having the separation of the dots, your eye kind of fudges it and says, 'Yeah, this is the same rocket ship…'"

Now, we all know that in space no one can hear you scream, but blasting alien scum wouldn't be half

> "I got a little square moving on the screen. Nolan said: 'Now we need a rocket ship!'"
>
> TED JOINS THE DOTS…



BEND IT LIKE BUSHNELL

IF YOU'VE SEEN *Computer Space* in action, you'll notice that after launching a shot at those vicious saucers, you can 'bend' your bullet towards your intended target by rotating your ship. It's an ingenious feature, which later appeared on *Combat* for the VCS, though it emerges it was more a case of necessity. "The missile starts out from the front of the rocket ship, but when the ship moves, the front of the ship is in a different place on screen," explains Ted. "There was no way we could 'remember' a point on screen, so it had to move in relation to the front of the ship. Let's call it a guided missile!" Ted added in a clever feature to signify a successful hit, too. "I just inverted the video so the screen flashed white. It was a cheap, easy way to create the sense of an explosion." Ted also used this inversion technique to signal extended play and called it 'hyperspace', yet another debt that Atari's biggest hit, *Asteroids*, owes to its granddad...

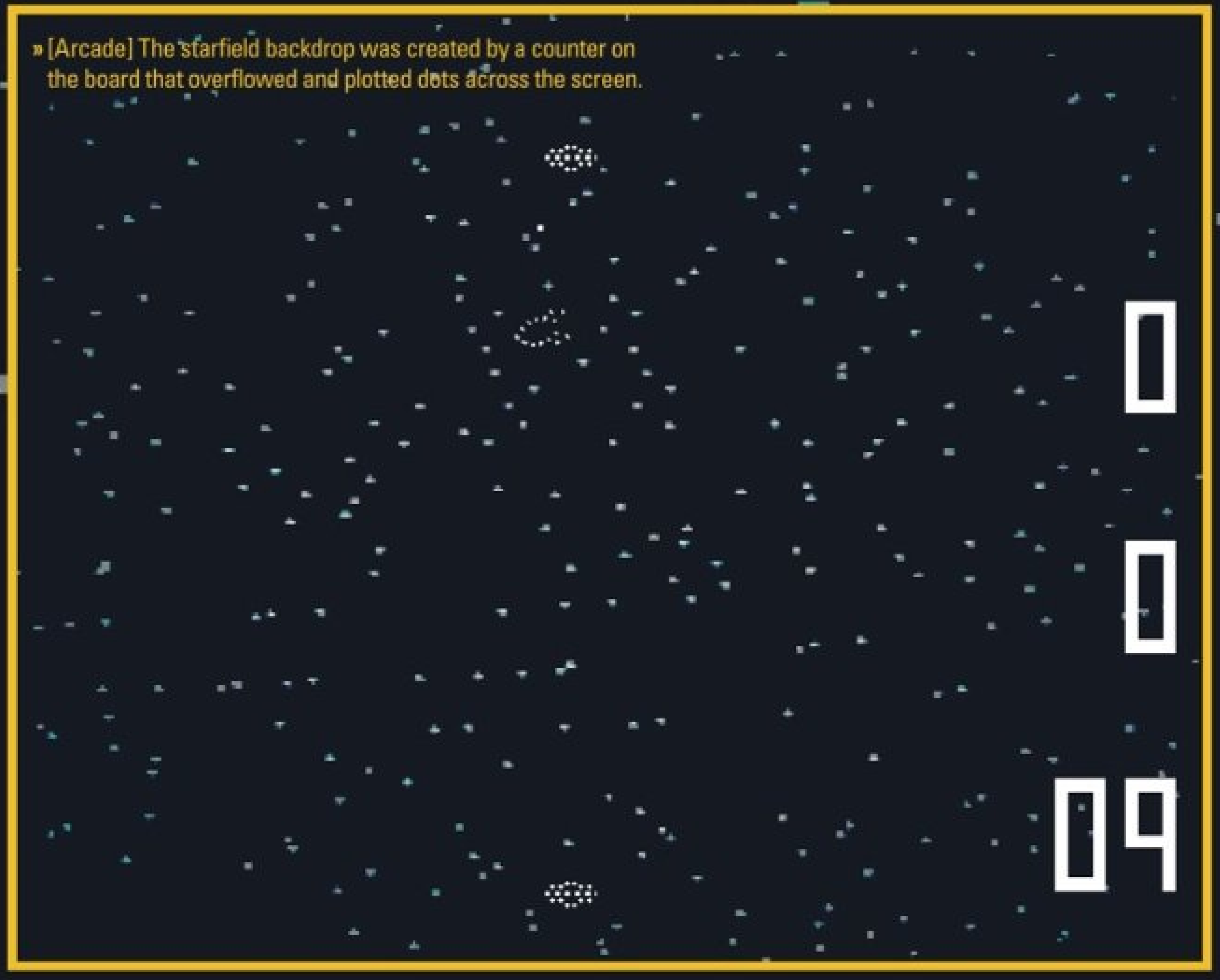
as much fun if performed in silence. Cleverly using a 6V Zener diode, a voltage regulating device that just happened to give off pink noise as it did its job, Ted added a little amplifier and an integrator that charged up and decayed to fade the volume out. "I built the sound circuits and motion circuitry," he says, proudly. "Then Nolan made them into a game."

At this point, **RG** is profoundly aware that we are talking about a game that, despite its huge historical importance, most of you have probably never played. Coming from a time before arcade machines used microprocessors, there is no 'code' for the usually helpful MAME to emulate, so unless you live near the Funspot arcade in New Hampshire, which has an actual machine in its classic games room, may we recommend the convenient 'simulator' found at **www.computerspacefan.com**, an excellent site that also catalogues the location of all surviving cabinets.

Once you've spent some time trying to blast those pesky saucers while dodging their bullets within a strict time limit, we think you'll notice several things. Although *Computer Space* is clearly inspired by *Spacewar!*, it is certainly no clone. It's a single-player game, for a start, and there's no central star exerting a gravitational pull either. We also think you'll be struck by the difficulty. Your ship is in perpetual motion, which may adhere to the laws of physics in outer space but proves rather inconvenient to *Asteroids* players, used to their ship slowing down and stopping if you leave off the thrust. This is further compounded by the deadly accuracy of your flying saucer foes. Why did Nolan seem intent on killing the first generation of videogame players with such regularity?

"The idea it was too hard never crossed my mind," he laughs. "All my friends loved it, but then all my friends were engineers. It wasn't until we put it into a beer bar and people were totally baffled that we thought maybe we've overshot our mark! As for making *Computer Space* a one-player game, the coin-op industry was based around solitary game players. I mean, Bally turned *Pong* down because it was two-player!"

With the game elements starting to come together, Nolan decided to present his idea to Nutting Associates. The California-based



» [Arcade] The starfield backdrop was created by a counter on the board that overflowed and plotted dots across the screen.

IN THE BEDROOM

SOME READERS MAY be aware of the ongoing dispute as to where the pioneering work on the *Computer Space* circuitry actually took place. For decades, it was thought that Nolan ousted his daughter from her bedroom to set up shop there but, more recently, Ted has gone on record as saying it all happened at his house. We asked Nolan to clear up the controversy. "The real answer is that it was in both," he explains. "Ted was doing his work and I was doing mine. Quite frankly, I had forgotten he was working in his daughter's bedroom as well. The blogs can get carried away. I fuelled it by saying once that I didn't think he even had a daughter. That was grist for the mill…"

Ted has a slightly different take on things. "My daughter Terri used to babysit for Nolan, so he knew I had a daughter, and his wife back then, Paula, would not let him do anything in that house. He didn't even own a soldering iron."

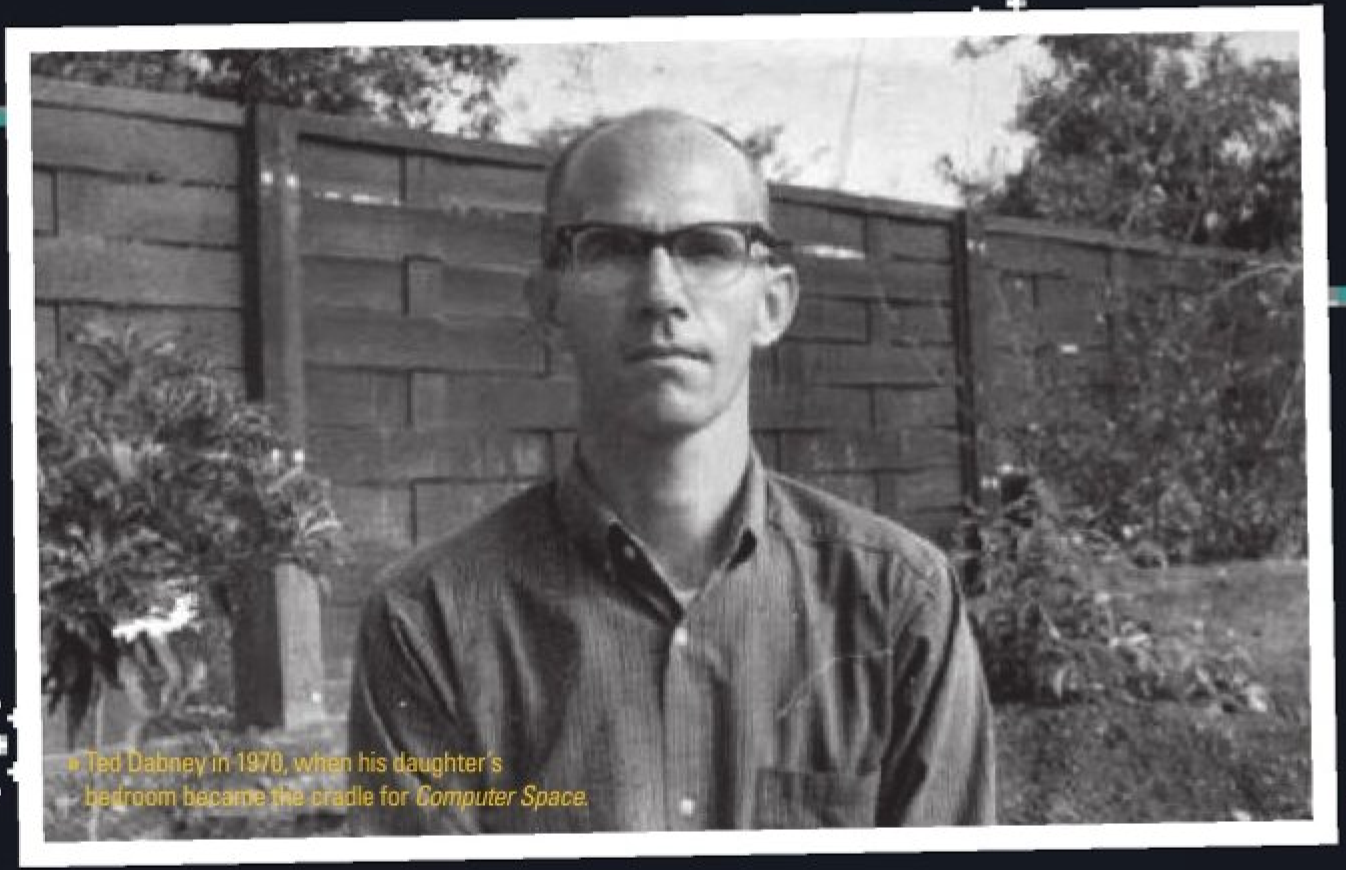
company had had considerable success in the coin-op industry with *Computer Quiz*, but with that product reaching the end of its commercial life, it was eager for new machines to manufacture. "I don't think they really understood what a videogame was, but they thought it sounded like a capital good idea," Nolan winks. "I'd only really got dots on the screen but I presented myself pretty well as an up-and-coming smart boffin – I was speaking British for you there – so they hired me as chief engineer. I left Ampex and was working for Nutting in the day, helping them finish up some projects, and at nights I was working with Ted on *Computer Space*. I specified in my contract I would retain rights to all the videogame technology, though."

The *Computer Space* circuitry had been coming together nicely, thanks to some assistance from an undergraduate on placement at Ampex by the name of Steve Bristow, and now that he had a position at a major player in the coin-op business, Nolan was understandably enthusiastic about his groundbreaking project to bring *Spacewar!* out of the computer lab and into the arcades. Then he received some startling news. Someone else had had just the same idea.

As a student at Stanford in the mid-Sixties, Bill Pitts had been similarly entranced by *Spacewar!*. After graduating, he teamed up with school friend Hugh Tuck, whose hardware know-how and family money nicely complemented Bill's software skills. By the summer of 1971, their version of *Spacewar!*, entitled *Galaxy Game*, was almost ready to meet the public, when Nolan heard news of the project.

"I had some trepidation when I went over to see what they were doing," acknowledges Nolan, "but I had this suspicion that no one would have worked out how to do it as cheaply as I had. They had one in the coffee shop at Stanford, using a PDP-10, I think. I thought they'd done a great rendition of *Spacewar!*, but I did a quick costing and thought, 'This is no competition.'"

Nolan was right on both counts. *Galaxy Game* was far more faithful to the source material, but due to basing their machine around an actual computer rather than custom circuitry, it was hugely more expensive at around $20,000 in total and considerably more unreliable. Though it could never hope to recoup its cost in quarters,



▪ Ted Dabney in 1970, when his daughter's bedroom became the cradle for *Computer Space*.

> **"When we put it in a bar, people were totally baffled"**
>
> NOLAN UNDERSTANDS THAT COMPUTER SPACE IS HARD ENOUGH WHEN YOU'RE SOBER



Galaxy Game beat *Computer Space* to market by two months, debuting in September 1971, and thus has the honour of being the first arcade videogame. That original machine was replaced by a superior version the following year, utilising a PDP-11 that supported two play screens simultaneously, which remained in situ at Stanford's Tresidder Memorial Union throughout the Seventies. For more on this innovative oddity, see chapter two of *Replay,* Tristan Donovan's wonderfully readable history of videogames, or visit the machine itself in its new home at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California.

Undeterred, even encouraged by the appearance of this unexpected rival, Nolan pressed on, with Ted joining him at Nutting and proceeding to build a prototype cabinet ready for field-testing. The game debuted at the Dutch Goose bar in Menlo Park, California, in November 1971, with both proud parents accompanying their baby.

"Ted and I took it over in the back of my station wagon, and as soon as we plugged it in, there was an immediate cluster around the machine and play after play," enthuses Nolan. "We were convinced we had a major hit on our hands. But you see, the bar was a hangout for Stanford students, all smart as hell. Lots of engineers and maths and physics majors. Newton's second law wasn't a big problem for them! We put it in another few places and you could best describe the clientele as bimodal. They had no clue about what was going on. They'd say: 'I can't control this thing. How do you make it go right and left?' I remember trying to teach people about the thrust control and it just wasn't part of their DNA."

Worse still, the less cerebral crowd seemed to have taken their frustration out on the machine. The prototype cabinet featured a joystick-cum-trigger controller, which snapped after a single day out in the field. For the version put into production, four buttons were used instead – rotate left, rotate right, thrust and fire – which may have bemused tipsy punters but was at least able to physically withstand their drunken advances.

More pleasing to players was the stylish cabinet the game sat within. "Form follows function," states Nolan. "This was a space game and so should have a space age cabinet. I made a model from Plasticine. I had a little bit of plastic for the screen and a piece of wood for the back, and moulded it to that shape. Ted found a fibreglass guy who figured out how to make it into the cabinet. I sent my model to the manufacturer and they scaled it up."

Fortunately, this didn't result in a Spinal Tap Stonehenge-style fiasco, and around 1,500 – although Nolan



» [Arcade] Controlling your ship can take some getting used to, thanks to authentic outer space physics.







» Nolan poses with a surviving *Computer Space* cabinet, of which less than 100 are accounted for.

thinks the figure may have been as high as 2,200 – of the futuristic-looking *Computer Space* machines were manufactured.

And the game flopped. Well, that's what the received wisdom seems to conclude. We wish to challenge this notion. The sales figures may have been dwarfed by future hits like *Pong* and *Asteroids* – which, you could argue, was a spiritual successor – but at the start of the Seventies, a successful pinball table would only sell around 2,000 units. It provided an income stream for Nolan and Ted, which helped to fund the *Pong* project. Indeed, when the very first *Pong* prototype was placed in Andy Capp's Tavern, it sat next to a *Computer Space* cabinet, convincing Nolan that, in gameplay terms, simplicity was the key to success. It was a philosophy that he and Ted would adhere to when they left Nutting and formed Atari the following year, thus kick-starting the whole videogames industry.

"I felt this was a medium, not just a product," says Nolan. "Remember, there were more games on the computers at university than *Spacewar!*. I'd done a game called *Fox And Geese*, there was a baseball game… people were programming! I was very happy with *Computer Space*. When you create something with your hands as well as your mind, it has a special place in your heart."

> “I'm treated like a rock star. It's been 40 years coming and I love it!”
>
> TED DABNEY IS LIVING PROOF THAT GOOD THINGS COME TO THOSE WHO WAIT IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY



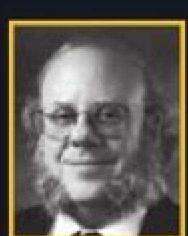
While Nolan went on to gain fame and fortune with Atari, Ted left the company in 1973, after an acrimonious falling out with his former friend. His crucial role in those early days of the games industry went unacknowledged for years, but recently, due to the efforts of games historian and author Leonard Herman, among others, the situation is changing.

"I don't give a diddly-squat about games," laughs Ted, "but getting this recognition is fantastic. I'm treated like a rock star. It's been 40 years coming and I love it!"

Thanks to Marty Goldberg and Jerry Jessop for their help with this article.

Space Men

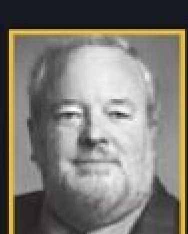
We talk to three industry legends about their connection to Computer Space



STEVE BRISTOW

had several placements at Ampex while studying at the University of California at Berkley in the late Sixties and early Seventies. He later followed Nolan to Nutting Associates and worked on the two-player version of *Computer Space*, before moving to Atari, where he stayed until 1984.

"Nolan was my supervisor at Ampex and he had me working on some prototype circuits, which turned out to be portions of the memory and motion controller boards for *Computer Space*. I saw the schematics for the game in the office he shared with Ted and I saw pieces of the prototype in a more assembled form when I visited them at Nutting. I first saw the production version when I started working at Nutting in March of '72. Production was just starting in earnest and I was the only person who troubleshot and fixed the boards. Of course I told people what I was doing and how cool it was! I was responsible for assembling and maintaining the two-player version at the AMOA show in Chicago in November '72. After that, I returned to school and took over the 40 or so coin-operated games that Syzygy/Atari had placed all over Berkeley and Oakland. I had two *Computer Space* machines and one was in Larry Blake's, a bar at UC Berkeley, near a *Galaxy Game*, and I'm sure we out-earned it. The coin box was never overflowing, but, in fairness, it was a one-gallon paint can, which could hold a lot more than the *Pong* prototype!"



AL ALCORN

was a colleague of Nolan and Ted's at Ampex and was one of Atari's first employees. He created *Pong*, which became the first major hit for coin-op videogames. He stayed with Atari into the Eighties, working on such successes as the home *Pong* and the VCS.

"I first saw *Computer Space* when Nolan and Ted invited some of their Ampex friends over to Nutting. I thought it was an interesting machine but didn't expect it to be a great success. When I came to work on *Pong*, Nolan gave me a set of schematics for *Computer Space*, but I really didn't use them, as they were drawn in a style that made it difficult to understand. We discussed the fundamentals of his patented motion circuit and I went from there. Remember, Nolan told me *Pong* was going to be a home game, so it had to use far fewer chips than *Computer Space*! I remember Nolan and Ted talking about one of the first locations for a *Computer Space* machine at a mall. The machine had a prototype joystick and it was destroyed in a day. They gave up and went with buttons. I never actually serviced a *Computer Space* – Steve Bristow has more experience with that – but I do recall servicing a *Pong* cabinet at the Stanford student union and competing with a *Galaxy Game* by Bill Pitts. I would be scooping quarters out of our game while Bill was struggling with his."



ARCHER MACLEAN

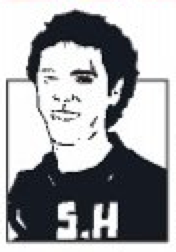
has been in the games industry for over 30 years, creating such home computer hits as *Dropzone*, *IK+* and *Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker*. He also restores arcade cabinets and, among his large collection of pristine machines, is a beautiful blue *Computer Space*.

"I was hunting for a *Computer Space* for ages, and eventually one came up on eBay about 12 years ago. It was a bit dead and had a large foot sized 'kick' hole on the lower front. This didn't put me off as I believed I had the electronics skills to sort the PCB out and my mate John is an expert at candy-apple sparkly paint sprays on Sixties-style fibreglass beach buggies! When it arrived, it had an aged-looking two-page typed note lying in the bottom, which basically said, 'Any problems, call Nolan direct on (415) 961-9373'. I think he's gone a few places since then! Amazingly, it's been 100 per cent reliable since getting it working in 2001. The screen is an ancient valve-based TV, which takes a minute to 'glow' into life, and the chips used on the PCBs are Jurassic-era ECLs and TTLs. Most of them have had their ID chemically removed to prevent cloning back in the day. Once it was restored, it has been in great demand from museums and television companies. The best was when it was used for the actual film presentation at the 2009 BAFTA Fellowship award given to Mr Bushnell himself, nearly 40 years after he designed it."

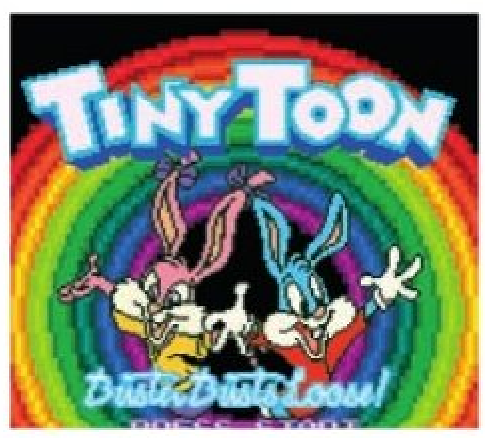
CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS

TINY TOON ADVENTURES: BUSTER BUSTS LOOSE!



It's fair to say the 16-bit generation had its pick of platform games starring spring-stepped animals on wafer thin missions set across colourful stages. With so many platformers of this ilk, it was always refreshing when one came along that dared to do something a bit different, such as this entertaining offering from Konami which was based on the *Tiny Toon Adventures* cartoon series.



INFO

- **SYSTEM:** SUPER NINTENDO
- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A

For those unfamiliar with the show (and we're expecting there to be a fair number of you), it injected new life into the classic *Looney Tunes* cartoons of old by centring on the younger, hipper and snarkier decedents of Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, and P- P- P- Porky Pig. The basic setup of the show saw the characters attending Acme Acres Looniversity to learn their craft, and episodes were a mixture of new stories, movie parodies and remakes of classic *Looney Tunes* cartoons.

The success of the show spawned a surprising number of videogames, and it was the Super Nintendo game *Buster Busts Loose!* that most gamers and fans seem to remember most fondly. Unlike previous *Tiny Toon* videogames, Konami decided to cleverly frame each level as its own individual TV episode. This meant each stage could look and play dramatically different from the next, and is where much of the attraction and brilliance of *Buster Busts Loose!* comes from.

While the first Acme Acres Looniversity stage feels like a pretty standard opener, it doesn't take long for things to really shift gear. Each stage had a very clear and definite theme, and the further you got in the game the more attention-grabbing and bonkers they felt. And the satirical references to popular movies, of which the show was famous for making, also became more frequent.

In one stage, you're tasked with trying to make a dash through the dismantling carriages of a runaway steam train before having to make your daring escape on a railroad cart by hammering the fire button to reach a speed of 88 miles-per-hour. In another youre slotted into a fantastic *Star Wars*-infused world that sees you having to repeatedly jump into cover to avoid the explosions from a dramatic space battle occurring in the background.

Be it jumping rope, partaking in a selection of fantastic varied mini-games, or helping Buster and pals trying to get a pigskin 100 yards to score a winning touchdown, *Buster Busts Loose!* continually surprises.

While there are only six levels – and once you've finished them all, it's a breeze to repeat the act – each was packed with so much imagination that once finished the replaying it again was the first thing on your mind.

It's a solid and entertaining platformer that has aged brilliantly, and with copies trading hands for as little as a tenner, it's an essential game for any SNES collector working to a budget.



» [SNES] The game is worth playing simply for the fine mini-games on offer. Shame you couldn't play them separately.



» [SNES] Easily one of the best looking platformers of its time, visually *Buster Busts Loose!* still holds up well today.

BUSTER GROOVE

Your instant guide to the world of *Buster Busts Loose!*



DASHING HERO

Similar to *Sparkster*, Buster can dash for a short while, and must be used to complete certain sections.



WHEELS O' GAME

Between stages, Buster spins a wheel that decides the mini-game he'll play for the chance to win extra lives.



TOON SPOOF

There are movie parody stages. This culminates with a final stage that spoofs *Star Wars* based on an episode.



FAN SERVICE

Fans of the show will notice other levels inspired from episodes, including The Acme Bowl and High Toon.



BOSSES

Boss stages show an element of imagination. Here we had to feed Dizzy Devil rubbish till he fell asleep.



LEVEL DESIGN

Each level features a handful of great little set-piece moments that keep the action chugging at a fast pace.





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Minority Report

Gaming has its world-beating systems and games. Just as interesting are platforms and titles that, but for fate, could have been serious contenders. Rory Milne looks at some great gaming on less familiar systems, and some under appreciated classics on better known hardware





KISHIN DOUJI ZENKI FX: VAJURA FIGHT

■ SYSTEM: PC-FX ■ DEVELOPER: HUDSON SOFT ■ YEAR: 1995

» PC-FX



» [PC-FX] Chiaki leaps from girder to girder as scaffolding collapses all around her.

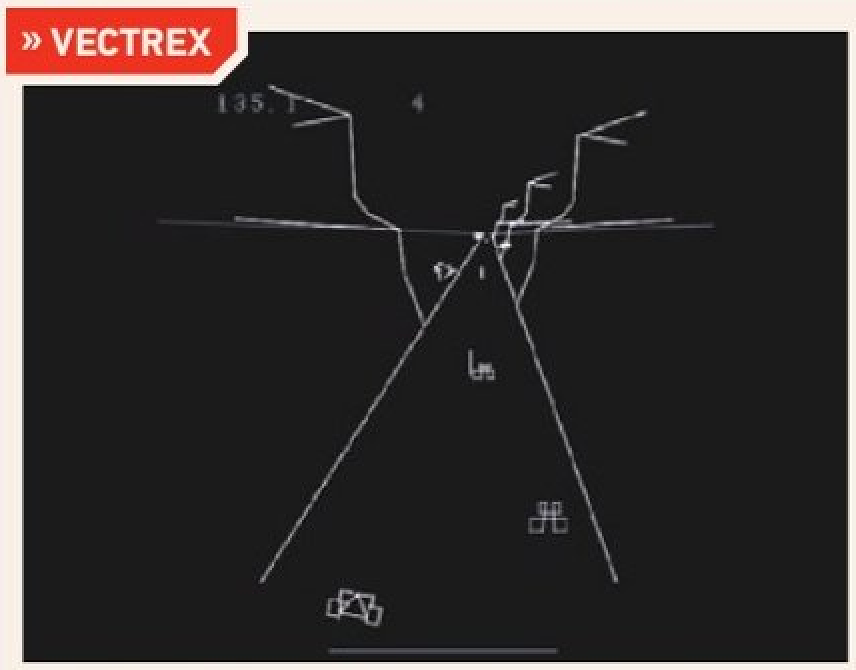
■ **NEC's PC-FX is a system that you feel didn't quite achieve its full potential. Its library was dominated by the less than loved technology that is FMV, and to make matters worse, as sales plummeted, NEC became less discriminating as to which titles it allowed to be released. This only served to further tarnish it's reputation as a games machine. But as with a lot of poorly served systems there were exceptions, and *Kishin Douji Zenki FX: Vajura Fight*, or *Zenki* for short, is just that.**

Arguably the most rare, sought after PC-FX title for the system, this is a showcase for everything PC-FX gaming could and should have been. Based on a Japanese manga series and produced by the developer with closest ties to NEC, Hudson Soft, what we get is a fast-paced beat-'em-up with sumptuous FMV scenery, and beautifully animated (and often huge) sprites. There's also an ongoing storyline played out between the action via talking heads that, although in Japanese, manage to overcome the language barrier somewhat thanks to exaggerated facial expressions.

In terms of gameplay the, single-player game requires you to best a series of opponents and rescue a girl who is continually being kidnapped. Players get to choose from hero Zenki or sidekick Chiaki. The interesting, varied and often huge bosses offer a strong challenge, but thankfully they're interspersed with minions that dish out less punishment, giving the player a chance to catch their breath.

The boss encounters are one of the most impressive aspects of the game and really let the PC-FX shine. You

» VECTREX

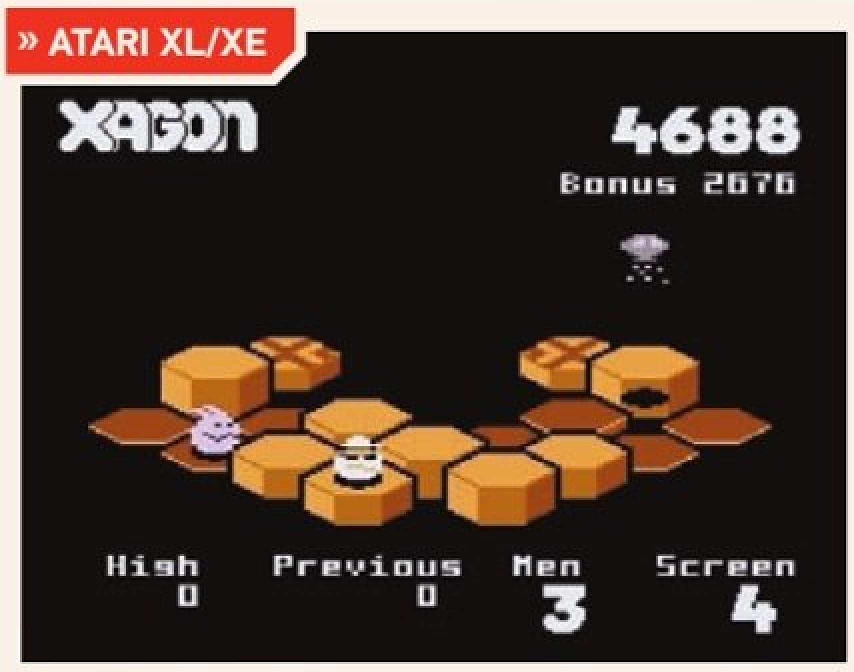


» HYPERCHASE

■ SYSTEM: VECTREX
■ DEVELOPER: GCE ■ YEAR: 1982

■ **In this early,** into-the-screen racer, trees, cliffs and canyons zip past while you desperately try to avoid other drivers and the explosive sides of the road. There are two distinct modes on offer: a time trial with unlimited lives and a high-score chase with five crashes allowed. Crashing happens frequently at first as you adapt to the sensitive controls, but trickier manoeuvres require a light touch so they do need to be mastered. Did we mention everything in the game kills you? Not that this feels unfair though, and the many fatalities do decrease with practice. Well worth a test drive for those with the patience.

» ATARI XL/XE

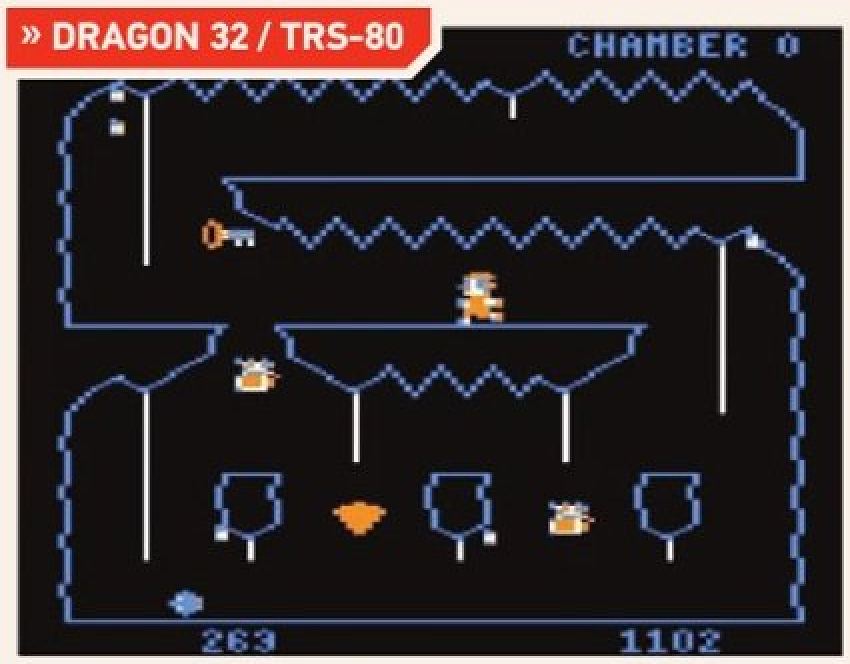


» XAGON

■ SYSTEM: ATARI XL/XE
■ DEVELOPER: ANG SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1983

■ **Here's an interesting** take on *Q*bert*, being that it's played on hexagons. You hop between shapes with the aim of making them the same height while avoiding the quirky enemies – specifically space hoppers and floating skulls. They interact with patterned hexagons, stripes causing hoppers to sink then re-emerge, crosses teleporting skulls, and circles sucking in and killing. A get-out-of-jail mechanic allows you to launch opponents skywards by firing at them. And instead of pyramids, varied playfields offer progressive difficulty. An inspired idea rather than a copied one, and one worth experiencing.

» DRAGON 32 / TRS-80



» DOWNLAND

■ SYSTEM: DRAGON 32 / TRS-80
■ DEVELOPER: SPECTRAL ASSOCIATES ■ YEAR: 1983

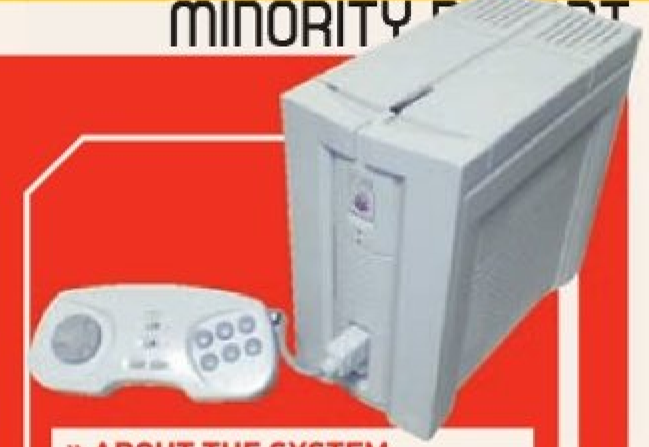
■ **The location:** a cavern with ropes hung from ledges, dripping acid, deadly boulders, kamikaze birds, keys and treasure. Your task: To collect keys to open doors between the cavern's chambers and ultimately reach the tenth chamber. The game then loops, but the challenge lies in getting there. Lower ledges are reachable with pixel-perfect jumps, while higher ones are only accessible by shimmying up, down or across ropes, meaning *Downland* requires proper old-school platforming skills. Other dangers including perfectly timed leaps, but most fatalities result from falling from too great a height. Frustrating yet addictive stuff.

» [PC-FX] On the run from a horned car-monster in an abandoned car park.



» [PC-FX] A powered-up Chiaki lets loose on a goliath armoured frog.





» ABOUT THE SYSTEM

- The PC-FX was a joint venture between NEC and Hudson Soft who provided its custom chipset.
- Launched only in Japan in 1994, it saw just 62 official releases.
- FMV titles dominated its library while rival platforms offered polygon gaming.
- A 3D expansion card was proposed but never appeared.

get to fight an eagle-woman on top of a crashing jetliner, the grim reaper in a 'train of the dead', a screen-sized snake in her dank sewer, a horned car-monster in an abandoned car park, and a goliath armoured frog in a ghostly playground. On defeat, bosses leave behind their life-force, which you can collect to regain full health. Also watch for jewellery which an unnamed ally drops into play, that when picked up temporarily cause Zenki to increase in size and power. If he isn't active in the game, he appears, bulks up, bursts into flames and flies off, decimating the boss' energy bar on his way. If in play he transforms then packs a greater punch.

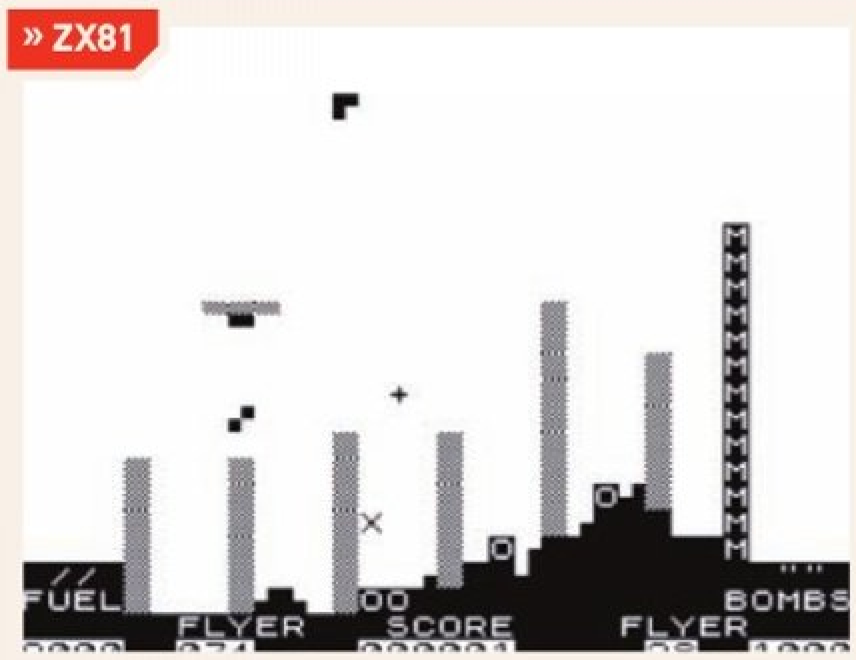
Just as striking are the breathtaking FMV scene changes, backdrops and foregrounds such as magical portals, clouded skyscapes and scaffolding that collapses all around you as try to leap from girder to girder. The soundtrack meanwhile changes each scene to reflect the unfolding drama, and is often skilfully employed to further heighten tension, while emotionally charged voice acting and lively sound-effects enhance the manic on-screen proceedings.

This is a very special game, though perhaps not quite unique as many might think. Comparisons could be made to *Guardian Heroes*, and certainly fans of Treasure's masterpiece that haven't sampled Zenki would be well advised to check it out. This would be good advice to those who have passed on the PC-FX altogether. There is a reason to love the PC-FX, and Zenki is its name.



» [PC-FX] Our heroes get sucked through a magical portal by their archenemy.

» ZX81

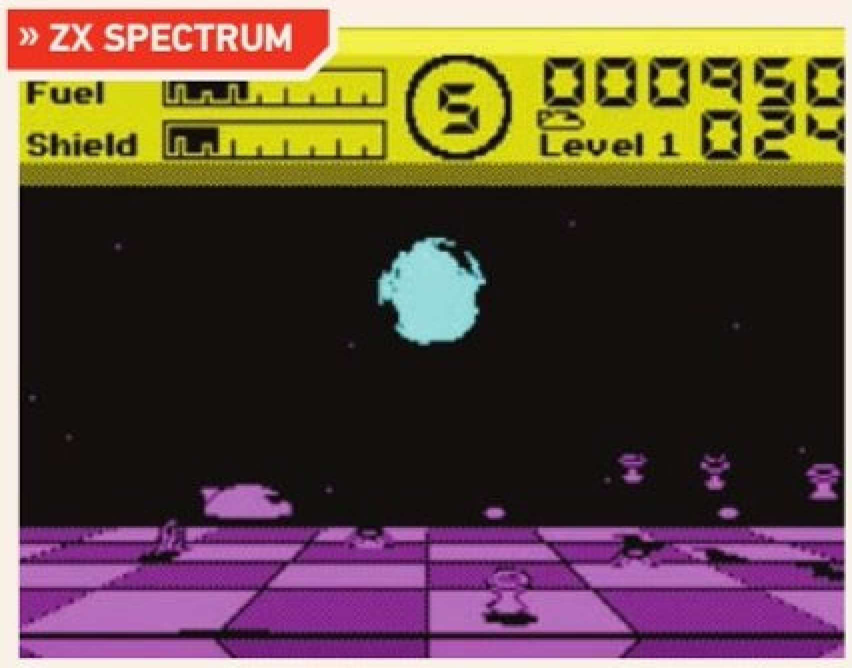


» FUNGALOIDS

■ SYSTEM: ZX81
■ DEVELOPER: MICHAEL ORWIN ■ YEAR: 1982

■ **The Fungaloids plan** to grow sky-high, release deadly spores and wipe out mankind. They defend themselves by firing projectiles, while your 'flyer' is armed with extremely useful anti-fungus bombs. You have to bomb them all, collect 100 points, then continue play. Minimal fuel and weapons make refills an awkward necessity. Awkward because creatures called Splodges and Flitters obstruct your movements, and mutant fungi block off your bomb store. It's also imperative to avoid hitting underground cities, as this costs you 20 points. Lastly, you only get one life. In short – tough but fair.

» ZX SPECTRUM



» EARTHLIGHT

■ SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM
■ DEVELOPER: FIREBIRD ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **Behind an attractive,** faux-3D lunar landscape lies this shooter/collect-'em-up, which is worth tracking down. You must find transmitters at fixed locations which are your means of returning to Earth, but careful collection is advised as they can become casualties of skirmishes with local inhabitants. Other perils include fuel running out, shields depleting and missiles being wasted. Zones in each level can be attempted in any order and although demanding a unusual skill-set for the genre by adding movement into/out of the screen, once perfected *Earthlight* proves itself equal to its acclaimed contemporaries.

» ATARI 2600



» QUADRUN

■ SYSTEM: ATARI 2600
■ DEVELOPER: ATARI ■ YEAR: 1983

■ **While *Quadrun* was** given a limited release, it's widely respected and a true cult classic. Your mission: shoot vertically moving Captors with one of three Phaser Balls, then warp up or down to retrieve your ball. You'll also need to periodically rescue horizontally moving Runts from electrocution by warping in their direction. Each level's Captors have unique attack patterns that need to be mastered, but all steal your balls on contact. Shoot five Captors to progress, but miss one or let a Runt die and an on-screen counter is reduced; when it, or your balls are gone, it's game over! Essential gaming. Seek it out.


PAL VERSION
RESET
EJECT
POWER
ON
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Nintendo
SUPER NINTENDO
ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

SUPER



Retro Collector's Adam Buchanan explains why every serious gamer needs to own a SNES



» **Manufacturer:** Nintendo **»** **Models:** Super Nintendo/Super Famicom **»** **Launched:** 1990 **»** **Country of Origin:** Japan

NINTENDO

The Collector's Guide









» It wasn't just the games that came in flimsy cardboard boxes, making anything in-tact more valuable.

WHY IT'S COLLECTABLE

Growing up in the Nineties wasn't easy. From an early age, many gamers found themselves thrown into the epicentre of a digital war between two Japanese forces to be reckoned with.

Sega and Nintendo's conflict controlled the playgrounds and workplace, *Sonic* against *Mario*. The battle continues today, as the mention of the Super Nintendo versus the Sega Mega Drive has collectors raising their control pads with pride.

Despite hosting fewer games than Sega's 16-bit offering, the SNES hosts a wealth of blockbuster hits amongst its huge library of over 500 known European releases. With the likes of *Super Mario World*, *F-Zero* and *Pilotwings* available from day one, shortly followed by *Super Mario Kart*, *Mega Man X* and *The Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past*, it is no wonder that it has continued to captivate gamers to present day. However, it wasn't just about the high quality software available. Given that the gaming world had just experienced a very hard-edged and ugly selection of consoles (such as the NES and Master System), the arrival of an alluring curved console bundled with a comfortable control pad was too good to dismiss.

Where collecting is concerned, a large majority of the SNES catalogue has seen a considerable rise in value over the last few years from an influx of nostalgia-hungry gamers. But, surely these financial skirmishes taking place on auction sites are just as prominent for the Super Nintendo's 16-bit rival? Luckily, the Sega Mega Drive fans are much safer from this barrage of collectors due to one conclusive reason. Up until the Nintendo Gamecube, every game branded with the Official Nintendo Seal was released within a flimsy cardboard box. With so few mint condition boxed games available (in comparison to the near indestructible hard-cased Mega Drive games), they are highly sought after, as collectors challenge each other to replicate that brand new feeling again.

As time passed by and Mario's newest home began to build up an incredible momentum within Europe, a sporadic release schedule shortly followed and reared its ugly head. A large chunk of the rarest PAL releases originated from a single country, leaving frustrated gamers and collectors today trawling countless top-level domain variations of eBay. Of these rarities, *X Zone* (Scandinavia), *Whirlo* (Spain), *Cool World* (Spain), *Sonic Blast Man* (Spain) *Space Invaders* (Australia) and *Super Chase HQ* (Australia) tend to be the most sought after by 16-bit collectors around the world.

Although Nintendo had a wide range of multinational gamers, their hard work and dedication continued to ensure each Super Nintendo owner within Europe was catered for. Many releases were adjusted to better suit their target audiences – changes which often included alternate artwork, varying language options and occasionally 'classic' re-releases. Although this level of consideration sounds fantastic, those aiming to collect SNES variants face countless headaches due to the sheer volume of releases out there. *Super Mario World* is an extreme example of this, given its seventeen variants.



» The U.S. Super Nintendo pad dispensed with the bright colours of its PAL and Japanese counterparts.

DID YOU KNOW?

■ No matter how fondly you remember the aesthetic curves of the Super Nintendo console, a more minuscule and desirable iteration left the production line at Nintendo HQ. Dubbed the SNES Mini or SNES Jr, the redesigned console was released in both America and Japan for the low cost of $99.99 bundled with a pack-in game. While the baby-sized console never made its way to Europe, it remains a frequent purchase by those who missed out, but with a pinch of hesitation. In the most unusual case imaginable, the SNES Jr has been a victim of near perfect fakes arising on eBay over the years.



» There is quite a difference between Western and Japanese box art. Which you prefer is a matter of taste.



» Special edition cases were rare. If only they all came in metal tins, there would be a lot more complete packages today.



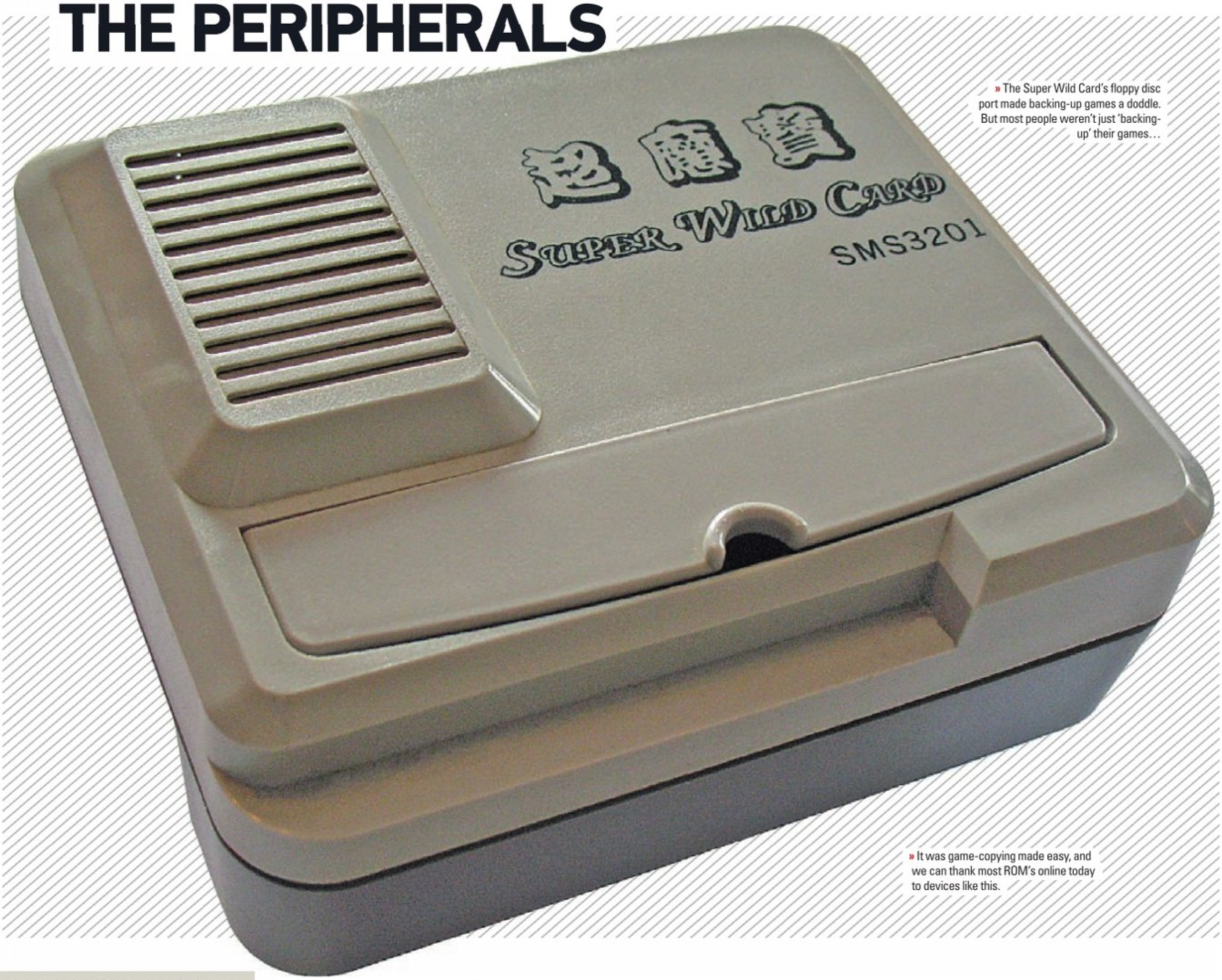
Complications aside, the Japanese and American release lists offered a much larger library of games, yet there was still a selection of prominent European releases which have gamers from across the pond intrigued. The most notable is the timeless Japanese RPG *Terranigma*, which for some untold reason saw a European localisation, yet nothing for gamers stateside. Auction snipers worldwide sit in wait for each and every time it surfaces, sadly driving the price up. *Whirlo*, *The Firemen* and *Super Bomberman 3* are other good examples of this, as European gamers often struggle to hold onto their hidden treasures.

One of the more interesting aspects to note during the 16-bit era, was how easy import games were to acquire. While the price tags within magazine adverts suggested that early arrivals of Japanese and American software were probably worth being patient for, there was one publication which almost justified these financial kidnappings. Simply known as *Super Play*, it is often referred to as the greatest gaming magazine of all time, due to its perfect combination of covering games and Japanese culture. As it focused mainly on imported titles months before their European release, a new wave of gamers were born unhappy with what their home country could offer. These disgruntled fans were often found excusing themselves as they happily paid premium prices to get their latest gaming hit way ahead of schedule. Whilst these purchases could often be expensive gambles, many of these investments have paid off, as gamers obtained classics such as *Earthbound*, *Final Fantasy III* (*VI*) and *Chrono Trigger* which never arrived in Europe. However, what they were unable to see at the time is how many of these exclusive imports would eventually fetch three figure sums, as they do today.

With such an enticement from abroad, often limited by how far our distressed wallets could be stretched, Super Nintendo fans were left questioning how they could enjoy the wealth of cartridges without skipping meals. Quite naturally, the black market was well aware of this fact and began to envision various ways to profiteer from the 16-bit juggernaut. While very few bootlegs found their way underneath the counter of less honest shops, the pirates had another device at the ready to potentially make the expensive cartridge medium a thing of the past. Given that a large majority of early cartridges could fit onto a single floppy disk, a disk drive was placed inside a Super Nintendo compatible device known as the Super Wild Card. Capable of backing up and loading cartridges from disk, this revolutionary and attractive piece of kit made stealing games all too easy. While there are more modern alternatives to this hardware, the Super Wild Card range and various other similar devices still get snapped up rather quickly due to their elusive nature.

Offering countless games spanning multiple regions and an array of diverse accessories, the Super Nintendo is by far one of the most desirable consoles to collect. Although the deep end of collecting is quickly requiring a well padded wallet to bask in, both gamers and collectors can take pleasure in the knowledge that the majority of the Super Nintendo's classic titles can still be had at a reasonable price.

THE PERIPHERALS



» The Super Wild Card's floppy disc port made backing-up games a doddle. But most people weren't just 'backing-up' their games…

» It was game-copying made easy, and we can thank most ROM's online today to devices like this.

SUPER WILD CARD

With cartridges breaking the upper limits of £59.99 in the Nineties, SNES owners often found themselves limited to how many games they can afford. While this did make game rental services a profitable business, the more savvy gamers amongst us looked for other solutions.

Piracy and cartridge copiers were no stranger to the games industry. Nintendo had already embraced the illegitimate series of 'Game Doctors' for the Famicom, which ironically used the Famicom Disk System's proprietary medium of unique disks to create counterfeit software. The SNES equivalent, however, used a more accessible method, which effectively made those expensive cartridges a non-issue.

The Super Wild Card released by Front Far East was amongst the many different flavours of backup devices which began to surface. Within each unit lay a floppy disk drive capable of reading and writing to a range of 3½-inch disk formats. Once powered up, a simplistic menu appeared on screen with the option to either back-up or load a game from the disk currently inserted. Titles exceeding the capacity of a single disk, such as the massive 48 Mbit *Tales Of Phantasia*, were broken down into multiple files often spanning a range of disks. Once the entire contents of these backups had been loaded into memory, the chosen backup would load instantly, replicating the true cartridge experience flawlessly.

Unfortunately for Nintendo, the entire process of backing up a Super Nintendo cartridge onto a disk was all too easy. Given that all you needed to duplicate a game was a minimum of one disk and the cartridge to copy from, swashbuckling gamers made the most of Blockbuster's game rental service by spending evenings 'renting' the selection of new releases. To make matters worse for the Nintendo, the disks written by the Super Wild Card were readable by any home computer with a disk drive installed. On each disk was a single ROM file (or single file broken up over multiple disks), which could be quickly copied onto another blank disk for the next well-equipped pirate gamer.

With newer games starting to exceed the capacity of a single disk, loading often became cumbersome. On the rear side of the Super Wild Card was a solution – a parallel port. With the right software available, gamers could send ROM files via a PC through a parallel port cable, in which the cartridge copier would begin to write to memory and execute the game upon completion. This quicker method was then bettered once more with the arrival of the newer and more expensive Super Wild Card DX2, a unit which allowed its disk drive to be swapped for a CD-ROM drive.

No matter which way you looked at it, the countless features made the Super Wild Card a rather inviting, although dishonest device. That said, these devices deserve our thanks as they are the main reason why the entire Super Nintendo library has been archived for future generations to come, in what we more commonly know as ROMs.

…AND THE REST



01. Super Scope

In an attempt to out-do one another in the light gun department, both Sega and Nintendo believed that 'bigger was better'. Light guns soon became light bazookas, and adding to the absurdity, the Super Scope was fitted with a shoulder rest and scope – making gamers feel rather awkward in front of the television.

02. Blaze Import Adapter

With Europe caught up in an import frenzy, meticulous gamers needed to make sure their rig was equipped for the amplitude of treats from abroad. As US games were too wide for the PAL slot, import adapters extended the cartridge slot upwards allowing all shapes and sizes to be attached.

03. Hudson Soft's Super Multitap

Realising the limitations of their earlier *Bomberman* outing on the NES, Hudson Soft bundled a four player adapter with its 16-bit release *Super Bomberman*. Allowing up to four players to connect into one controller port, players began to blast their way through a collection of tangled control pads and angry competitors.

04. Super Advantage/ Score Master

In a time when the arcades still offered unmatchable graphics and gameplay, the nearest you could get to the coin-op experience at home was with an arcade stick. Following on from the NES Advantage arcade stick, Nintendo released an updated model for the SNES known as the Super Advantage.

05. Super Everdrive and SNES PowerPak

Seen as the more modern alternative to the Super Wild Card, the newly introduced memory card-compatible cartridges allowed gamers to access the entire library of Super Nintendo games without emulation. Eliminating the need to invest deeply for the rarer titles, these state-of-the-art devices come as the ultimate accessory for the SNES.

06. Super Nintendo Mouse

Arriving bundled with the novelty graphic software package, *Mario Paint*, the compatibility of the SNES Mouse was often overlooked. Capable of working with over 50 games, the SNES Mouse offered gamers much more precision for the likes of *Sim City* and *Lemmings 2: The Tribes*.

07. Super Game Boy

In 1994 a device capable of playing Game Boy games on a Television was introduced to the Super Nintendo. Not only did this device allow full-screen action on games intended for a small LCD display, but it also enhanced the visuals with a range of colour and decorative borders to select Game Boy cartridges.

The Collector's Guide

TOP GAMES TO PLAY



Super Mario Kart

■ Was there ever any doubt that this manic multiplayer racer would make the list? The near-perfect kart racer still remains the pinnacle of the series to this day, and has spawned an abundance of clones.



Starwing/Star Fox

■ Utilising the powerful Super FX chip *Star Fox* was arguably one of the most groundbreaking releases during the Super Nintendo's lifespan, proving 3D was easily done in 16-bit.

The Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past

■ Having returned after a four-year hiatus, Link was back in his only outing on the Super Nintendo, proving there was still a plethora of life in the Hyrule legacy.



Super Mario World

■ Following on from the success of the NES hit release *Super Mario Bros 3*, Mario's next appearance on the Super Nintendo strengthened the very roots of the platform genre.



Donkey Kong Country

■ While offering a perfect blend of challenges and frustration, *Donkey Kong Country* should be in every collection purely for its sensational soundtrack and attention to detail.



PLAY THESE NEXT



Super Metroid

■ Eight years after Samus' first appearance, the third game in the *Metroid* series arrived on the SNES in 1994. It offered a doomed space colony to explore and the potential to get lost deep within Planet Zebes. The UK and German releases of *Super Metroid* also came in an oversized box bundled with a 72 page strategy guide.



Pilotwings

■ Falling into the lackluster flight simulation genre, *Pilotwings* was an unexpected hit arriving on launch day for the Super Nintendo. Taking control of some stunt-hungry aviators, your job is to carefully guide a selection of aircraft through hoops and loops. Easier said than done, *Pilotwings* is one of the hardest games to master.



Mega Man X

■ Like every other popular franchise on the NES, *Mega Man* was reborn on the Super Nintendo with a multitude of new abilities. Having outgrown his clunky robotic suit, the blue bomber was now able to dash and kick-jump walls. These tricks might of helped, but it was still an insanely difficult action-platformer.



Super Castlevania IV

■ With Dracula's revival dawning on Simon Belmont, the fourth edition in the hit series *Castlevania* arrived on the Super Nintendo just months after the console's release. Offering a range of graphical trickery, elaborate challenges and a groundbreaking soundtrack, *Super Castlevania IV* confidently built upon the iconic *Castlevania* name.



F-Zero

■ If there was ever a game to demonstrate the potential power and capability of a new system, *F-Zero* was it. Using the newly included feature of Mode 7 graphics on the Super Nintendo, the ultra-fast futuristic racer took faux-3D gaming to an all new level, both graphically and where gameplay is concerned.

TOP IMPORT GAMES

Tales Of Phantasia

■ While this 48 Mbit tale never ventured outside of Japan (before its Game Boy Advance port), fanatical SNES gamers compiled an accessible English translation patch for the Japanese ROM.



Earthbound

■ As RPGs continued to stick to their traditional roots, *Earthbound* broke the mould by creating a humorous, engaging adventure to which just about anybody could relate. Boing!



Final Fantasy III/VI

■ Often battling with *Chrono Trigger* for the title of 'Best SNES RPG', *Final Fantasy VI* (*III* in the US) pushed the genre's limits further than ever with its engrossing 60-plus hour expedition.



Super Mario RPG

■ While Europe was lucky enough to get the majority of Mario's adventures, the unusual combined effort from Squaresoft and Nintendo failed to arrive, much to many PAL gamers disappointment.



Battle Cross

■ While *Super Mario Kart* was dominating sales charts worldwide, this frantic Japanese exclusive was another worthy opponent for the title of 'Best Super Nintendo Multiplayer Racer'.



IMPORT THESE NEXT



Chrono Trigger

■ Squaresoft unquestionably defined the JRPG genre in the Nineties with their vast selection of epic adventures. *Chrono Trigger* was no different, presenting itself as one of the best releases of the decade. If the storyline wasn't enough to convince you, the visuals of *Dragon Quest* and *Dragon Ball Z* artist Akira Toriyama would.



Magical Pop'n

■ In what appears to be a light-hearted side-scrolling adventure, *Magical Pop'n* lures gamers in with its cute visuals shortly before unleashing an unforgettable challenge. After rising to cult hidden-gem status, this Japanese exclusive release developed by Polestar has seen endless competition for ownership on eBay.



The King of Demons (Majyuuou)

■ Often referred to as '*Castlevania* with a gun', *The King of Demons (Majyuuou)* is yet another addition to the list of hidden gems on the SNES. Featuring detailed landscapes and character sprites, the 1995 action game by KSS leaves many gamers wondering why it missed out on an a PAL release.



DoReMi Fantasy: Milon's DokiDoki Adventure

■ The top contender for the most sickeningly cute visuals is surely this, Hudson Soft's platformer is the perfect remedy for those gloomy days. Having never left Japan, the highly desirable and enjoyable *DoReMi Fantasy* has seen an incredible rise in value over the last few years.



Ogre Battle: March of the Black Queen

■ Although many will argue *Final Fantasy Tactics* defined the turn-based tactical RPG, *Ogre Battle* has many gameplay hooks which Squaresoft's later release owes inspiration to. While commanding high price-tags today, Atlus recently re-released the game on the PSP.

The Collector's Guide

TOP RAREST PAL GAMES

X Zone

■ Hailing from Scandinavia, this incredibly rare Nordic exclusive was one of the few releases to make use of the under-loved and under-used Super Scope light gun (or should that be light bazooka?)



Cool World

■ Arriving on the Super Nintendo as a tie-in for the (highly forgettable) movie of the same name, the Spanish exclusive of *Cool World* flopped even harder than the disappointing feature film.



Whirlo

■ Continuing to prove Spain has plenty to offer the rarity hunters, this hard-to-find Namco platformer offers much more than rarity alone, as it's an adorable and addictive adventure.



Brawl Brothers

■ By the time Jaleco released this sequel to *Rival Turf*, gamers had grown tired of side-scrolling beat-'em-ups, leaving *Brawl Brothers* to be fought over in years to come.



Aero The Acrobat 2

■ Despite being a rather enjoyable follow-up to *Aero*'s last outing, *Aero The Acrobat 2* exists in numbers arguably smaller than the financial figures it commands. A rarity worth having, if only for future price.



GET THESE NEXT



Daze Before Christmas

■ Rumoured to have only been sold during Christmas of 1994, this seasonal platformer unsurprisingly remains to be one of the tougher Super Nintendo titles to locate. Given its limited holiday shelf-life and lack of re-playability, this festive release sold in very low numbers similar to the Mega Drive game of the same name.



Operation Logic Bomb

■ Arriving as a sequel to the Game Boy top-down shooter *Fortified Zone*, the German release of *Operation Logic Bomb* was a shallow game offering nothing but pretty visuals. Like many Jaleco releases for the SNES, Operation Logic Bomb comes with a rather impressive rarity as collectors attempt to locate the failed shooter.



Space Invaders

■ Despite being a runaway hit in countless 1978 arcades, the PAL Super Nintendo-port of *Space Invaders* was only released in limited quantities throughout Australia. While the game remains a timeless classic, Taito did very little with the arcade port to make it stand out against the wide range of engaging SNES games.



Super Chase HQ

■ Adding the prefix of 'Super' to the name of an older game wasn't always a promise of enhanced gameplay and visuals. Taito took their much-loved arcade hit *Chase HQ* and sculpted an unplayable mess featuring a new in-car view. With such poor review scores, *Super Chase HQ* remained on the shelves, becoming a future rarity.



Hungry Dinosaurs

■ There's always a handful of games on any console that just don't click with gamers, *Hungry Dinosaurs* being one of them. Arriving as a two-player hybrid of *Othello* and *Snake*, this incredibly dull stone age-themed release sold poorly following a very negative reception from both gaming publications and gamers themselves.

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

It's commonly thought that no English language version of Soul Blazer exists. But is that true? If you turn to an unlikely place, you might just be surprised…











What makes it so special?

■ The most common versions of *Soul Blazer* hail from Europe and are in French or German, rendering it unplayable for the rest of the continent. Unknown to those who continue to import Enix's hit from abroad, an English language version of Soul Blazer has been available all these years, hidden deep within Scandinavia.



Why is it so expensive?

■ While the English language version is highly desirable, there's often another reason for the fluster of bids. The common European versions featured much plainer alternate artwork, surrounded by unattractive black borders. The harder to find game comes with a more attractive cover contained within stylish navy blue borders.



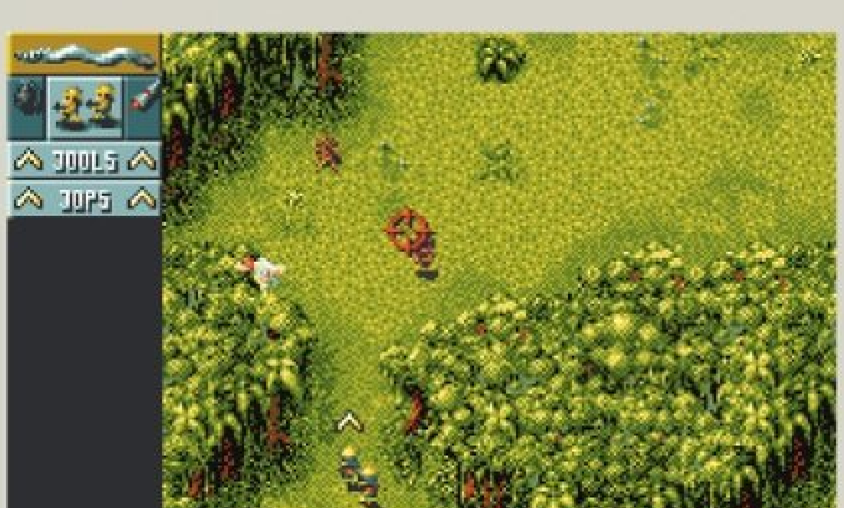
What makes it hard to find?

■ Acquiring the Scandinavian exclusive is no easy feat. Given the nearest to a Nordic eBay is Trader. The possibility of locating it, combined with finding a seller willing to accept offers from abroad, makes obtaining *Soul Blazer* a challenge. Those unwilling to embrace the struggle will have to wait for one to surface on eBay.

The Collector's Guide

THE SUPER NINTENDO GAMES YOU NEED TO OWN

- ACME Animation Factory
- ActRaiser
- ActRaiser 2
- Addams Family Values
- The Addams Family
- The Addams Family: Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt
- The Adventures Of Batman & Robin
- The Adventures Of Mighty Max
- Aero The Acro-Bat
- Aero The Acro-Bat 2
- Aguri Suzuki F-1 Super Driving
- Aladdin (Disney's)
- Alien Vs. Predator
- Alien 3
- All-American Championship Football
- Animaniacs
- Another World
- Ardy Lightfoot
- Arkanoid
- Astérix
- Astérix & Obélix
- Axelay
- Batman Returns
- BattleClash
- Battletoads In Battlemaniacs
- Beauty & The Beast (Disney's)
- Beethoven: The Ultimate Canine Caper
- BioMetal
- BlackHawk
- The Blues Brothers
- Boxing Legends Of The Ring
- Brawl Brothers: Rival Turf! 2
- Breath Of Fire II
- Bubsy II
- Cannon Fodder
- Captain Commando
- Casper
- Castlevania: Vampire's Kiss
- Chuck Rock
- Congo's Caper
- Cool Spot
- Cool World
- Cybernator
- Darius Twin
- Daze Before Christmas
- The Death And Return Of Superman
- Demon's Crest



Cannon Fodder



Mega Man X

- Desert Strike: Return To The Gulf
- Dino City
- Donald In Maui Mallard
- Donkey Kong Country
- Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest
- Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble!
- Double Dragon V: The Shadow Falls
- Dragon Ball Z
- Dragon Ball Z: Hyper Dimension
- Dragon Ball Z: La Légende SAIEN
- Dragon Ball Z: Ultimate Menace
- Earth Defence Force
- Earthworm Jim
- Earthworm Jim 2
- Equinox
- F-Zero
- Family Dog
- Fatal Fury 2
- Final Fight
- Final Fight 2
- Final Fight 3
- The Firemen
- Flashback
- Foreman For Real
- Ghoul Patrol
- Gods
- Goof Troop (Disney's)
- GP-1
- Hagane: The Final Conflict
- Harvest Moon
- The Humans
- Hungry Dinosaurs
- Hyper V-Ball
- HyperZone
- Illusion Of Time
- Incantation
- Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures
- International Sensible Soccer: World Champions: Limited Edition Featuring World Cup Teams
- International Superstar Soccer Deluxe
- International Tennis Tour
- Jack Nicklaus Golf
- Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour
- Joe & Mac: Caveman Ninja
- Joe & Mac
- Kid Klown In Crazy Chase
- Killer Instinct
- King Of Dragons
- Kirby's Dream Course

- Kirby's Fun Pack
- Kirby's Ghost Trap
- Knights Of The Round
- Legend
- The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja
- The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past
- Lemmings
- Lemmings 2: The Tribes
- Lethal Enforcers
- Loony Toons Basketball
- The Lost Vikings
- The Lost Vikings II: Norse By Norsewest
- Lufia
- Magic Sword
- The Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse
- Mario Paint
- Marko's Magic Football
- Marvel Super Heroes In War Of The Games
- Mega Man 7



Pilotwings

- Mega Man X
- Mega Man X2
- Mega Man X3
- Metal Combat: Falcon's Revenge
- Mickey Mania
- Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament
- Mohawk & Headphone Jack
- Mortal Kombat II
- Mr Do!
- Ms Pac-Man
- NBA Jam: Tournament Edition
- Ninjawarriors: The New Generation
- On The Ball
- Operation: Logic Bomb
- Oscar
- Out To Lunch (Pierre Le Chef Is)
- Pac-Attack
- Pac-Man 2: The New Adventures
- Parodius
- Phalanx
- Pilotwings
- Pink Goes To Hollywood
- Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure
- Plok
- Pocky & Rocky
- Pocky & Rocky 2
- Pop'n Twin Bee
- Pop'n Twin Bee: Rainbow Bell Adventures
- Power Drive

EXTREMELY RARE Games that have less than a few dozen known copies available.

VERY RARE Very hard to come by. Expect to see only a couple of copies per year.

RARE You should be able to source these in a reasonable amount of time.

UNCOMMON You won't find them straight away, but you will after a search.

COMMON Always just a click away for the average collector.

VERY COMMON So common you'll find them in most bundles of games you buy.

- Power Rangers Zeo: Battle Racers
- Prince Of Persia
- Prince Of Persia 2
- Putty Squad
- Puzzle Bobble: Bust-A-Move
- R-Type III: The Third Lightning
- Radical Rex
- Realm
- The Ren & Stimpy Show: Time Warp
- The Ren & Stimpy Show: Veediots!
- Rock 'N' Roll Racing
- Sailormoon
- Saturday Night Slammasters
- Secret Of Evermore
- Secret Of Mana
- Sensible Soccer: European Champions
- Shadowrun
- Shanghai II: Dragon's Eye
- Side Pocket
- SimCity
- Skyblazer
- Smash Tennis
- The Smurfs
- The Smurfs: Travel The World
- Soccer Kid
- Sonic Blast Man
- Soul Blazer
- Space Invaders
- Spanky's Quest
- Sparkster
- Spawn (Todd McFarlane's): The Video Game
- Starwing
- Street Fighter Alpha 2
- Street Fighter II
- Street Fighter II Turbo
- Street Racer
- Striker
- Stunt Race FX
- Sunset Riders
- Super Adventure Island
- Super Adventure Island II
- Super Aleste
- Super BC Kid
- Super Battleship: The Naval Combat Game
- Super Bomberman
- Super Bomberman 2
- Super Bomberman 3



Super Punch-Out!!

- Super Castlevania IV
- Super Chase HQ
- Super Dany
- Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
- Super Ice Hockey
- Super Mario All-Stars
- Super Mario All-Stars & Super Mario World
- Super Mario Kart
- Super Mario World
- Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island
- Super Metroid
- Super Off Road
- Super Pang
- Super Probotector: Alien Rebels
- Super Punch-Out!!
- Super Putty
- Super Smash TV
- Super Star Wars
- Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back
- Super Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi
- Super Street Fighter II
- Super Strike Gunner
- Super SWIV
- Super Tennis
- Super Turrican
- Super Turrican 2
- Super Widget
- Syvalion
- Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles IV: Turtles In Time
- Terranigma
- Tetris & Dr. Mario
- Tetris Attack
- The Chaos Engine
- The Great Circus Mystery Starring Mickey & Minnie
- The Lion King (Disney's)
- Thomas The Tank Engine & Friends
- Time Trax
- Tiny Toons Adventures: Buster Busts Loose!
- TKO Super Championship Boxing
- Top Gear
- Top Gear 2
- Top Gear 3000
- Toys: Let The Toy Wars Begin!
- True Golf Classics: Pebble Beach Golf Links
- UN Squadron
- Unirally
- Venom/Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety
- Wario's Woods
- WarpSpeed
- Whirlo
- Whizz
- Wild Guns
- World Cup Striker
- Worms
- WWF Wrestlemania: The Arcade Game
- X Zone
- Yoshi's Cookie
- Yoshi's Safari
- Zero: The Kamikaze Squirrel
- Zombies

Collector Q&A

Bryan Paton has been collecting SNES games for years and has amassed an impressive collection



How long have you been collecting for?
I have been collecting Super Famicom games since about 1998. Obviously I had a SNES in the early Nineties, but with the high price and only having pocket money, it was hardly collecting. When I started work in 1996 I suddenly had cash flow. At first all my cash went on Japanese N64 releases but after a couple of years I returned to my roots and I began my Super Famicom collection in earnest.

What does the SNES offer over its peers?
At the time it was easily the most powerful mainstream home console and everything looked amazing. Arcade titles like *Street Fighter II* just blew me away, and many of the most popular franchises have had their best instalments on the SNES. I think the sheer number of quality tiles across all genres is its strength.

Why do you prefer collecting Japanese games to their PAL counterparts?
I swapped a PAL copy of *Pilotwings* for a SFC version of *Hook* and as soon as I saw the box and the design, you could say I was 'hooked' (sorry). The aesthetics of the Japanese designs are, in my opinion, miles ahead of the Western releases. The sheer number of titles available in Japan puts the PAL catalogue to shame. Back in the day, magazines such as *Super Play* influenced my love of Japanese gaming and Japan has such an interesting culture, I think gaming is just an extension of that interest.

What's the most expensive game you own?
Rendering Ranger R2. It goes for silly money now, I've seen copies exchange hands for £500. I was lucky and actually picked it up in 1998 on a trip for about £45 new.

How important are mint boxes to you?
I wont even consider buying a game if it isn't complete and in good condition. Nintendo weren't thinking of the future when they decided cardboard was the way to go and it's getting harder to find games in top condition now, another reason the SNES commands such high prices.

What does your family/wife think of your hobby?
My wife is very understanding of my collection and has even been know to buy me SFC games for my birthday, not that I leave my wanted list lying around deliberately.

What advice would you give to other gamers interesting in collecting for the SNES?
Decide exactly what games and condition you want them in, and set a budget. Recently the SNES/SFC has become very expensive to collect. I was lucky and got in years ago, and gathered the majority of my 550 boxed games before the price boom. Know what you're getting into.



* Rarity guide courtesy of Retro Collect Head to www.retrocollect.co.uk for more information

Crusader: No Remorse

YOU'LL BE FILLED WITH REMORSE IF YOU DON'T PLAY IT

» RETROREVIVAL

» PC DOS
» ORIGIN SYSTEMS
» 1995

One of the greatest aspects of playing DOS games is that there's so much diversity to discover. Take *Crusader: No Remorse,* for example. At first it appears to be no more than a bog-standard isometric adventure, albeit one with extremely pretty visuals. But once you start digging beneath its surface you'll discover a riveting little shooter with all manner of neat touches.

Taking on the role of an assassin called the 'Silencer', who looks extremely similar to Boba Fett, your objectives are to obtain key-cards, infiltrate highly alarmed complexes and cause as much destruction as possible. This is partly thanks to the excellent engine that allows you to destroy quite a lot of the environment, set opponents on fire and more. The enhanced *Ultima VIII* engine received praise on its original release and it still holds up well today.

Fusing elements of *Metal Gear Solid* (sometimes stealth is key for bypassing certain areas) *Grand Theft Auto* and even *Diablo*, *Crusader: No Remorse* is an interesting hodgepodge of a game that's only really let down by its cumbersome controls. Your assassin is obviously a highly skilled agent, as the pleasingly hammy cut-scenes point out, but this athleticism doesn't always translate as well to the actual gameplay. Jumping, ducking and evasion are all in your assassin's repertoire, and on higher difficulty levels you'll really need to master the controls in order to defeat the challenging AI.

Even with the difficult to master controls, *Crusader: No Remorse* remains an essential title, because there's just so much depth. The missions are many and varied, there's an impressive range of satisfying weapons to use, while you'll even be given the odd moral choice. Numerous civilians populate the areas you're exploring, and while most will immediately cower in front of your armed hero, some will make a valiant attempt to raise the alarm. I always shoot the ones that run…

A sequel, *No Regret*, followed in 1996, and while it offered numerous new weapons and additional amusing death animations, it's the original game that I always find myself returning to. *





RG GAMES

Board of videogames

The golden age of the arcades saw Milton Bradley releasing a number of board games based on hits from Donkey Kong to Frogger. Darran Jones and Stuart Hunt stay in and, sitting by an open fire, play some of the best and worst examples







Pac-Man

'The exciting marble-gobbling game'

By: Milton Bradley Games | **For ages:** 7-14 years | **Players:** 2-4

CONTENTS
1 game board
60 marbles, including 4 yellow marbles
4 plastic trays
2 ghosts
4 Pac-Mans
1 label sheet
2 dice

THE OBJECT OF THE GAME

The ultimate aim of *Pac-Man* is just to gobble down more white marbles than your opponent. Starting from their respective coloured den on the playing board, players take it in turns to roll two dice, and use the number on one to move their Pac-Man piece and the other to move one of the two ghosts on the board. Munching the yellow pellets earns Pac-Man 'Ghost Gobbler Privilege', which, as you would expect, affords him the power to land on and gobble up a ghost. The game ends when all the white marbles on the board have been consumed.

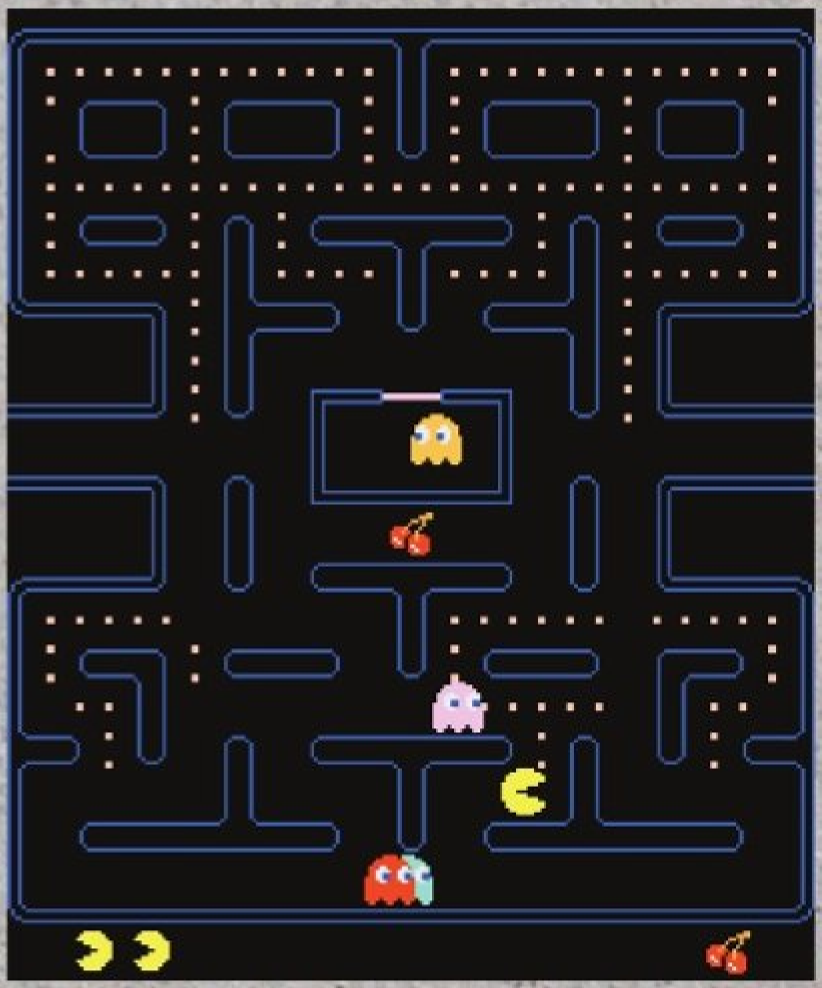
HOW IT PLAYS

It's basically a thinking man's *Hungry Hippos*, with you racing to scoff more white marbles than each of your rivals. The Pac-Man playing pieces add a nice tangible element to proceedings, although making Pac-Man swallow a marble can feel clunky – the manner of doing so is like using a hole punch, and if you are especially cack-handed you can easily slip and make a terrible mess of the board.

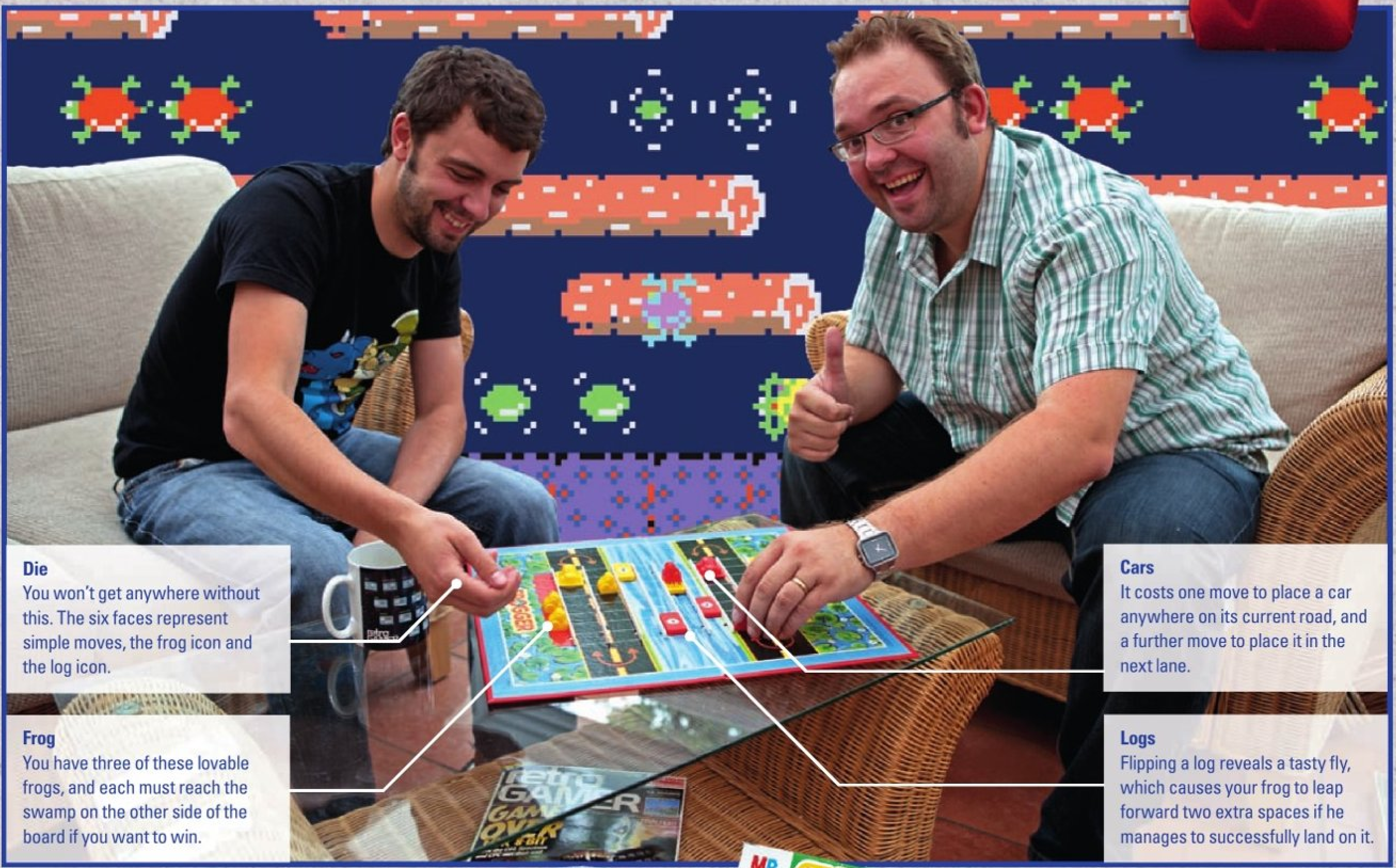
Our biggest gripe, though, is that the rules are not clear as to when and how long you can hold on to Ghost Gobbler Privilege. As such, depending on how you interpret this rule, players can cheekily hoard pellets, making for a slow and tedious game.

HOW IT COMPARES

This is where the game really succeeds in spades. Although obviously not a patch on the arcade game, this does capture the spirit and salient aspects of the source material: gobbling pellets, turning the tables on the ghosts, and shepherding them in an advantageous manner. It's a shame that the maze is a different layout to that of the arcade game and we would have liked to have seen some additional fruit pieces included that could be randomly scattered around the board for the chance to earn bonus points, but these are minor grumbles. Ultimately, we'd struggle to come up with a better way to adapt the arcade version of *Pac-Man* into a board game; it therefore gets two thumbs up from us.

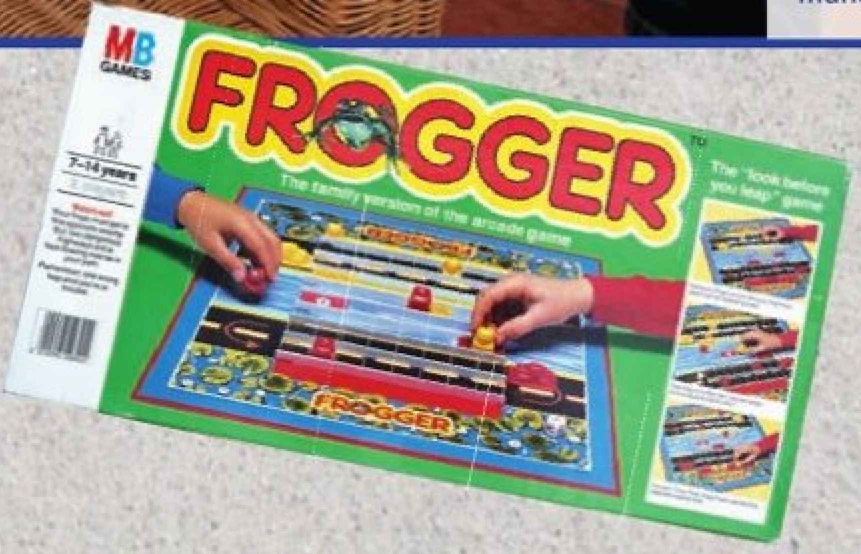






Frogger





'The "look before you leap" game'

By: Milton Bradley Games | **For ages:** 7-14 years | **Players:** 2

CONTENTS
- 1 game board
- 9 barriers on a runner
- 1 label sheet
- 6 frogs
- 4 logs
- 2 cars
- 1 die

THE OBJECT OF THE GAME

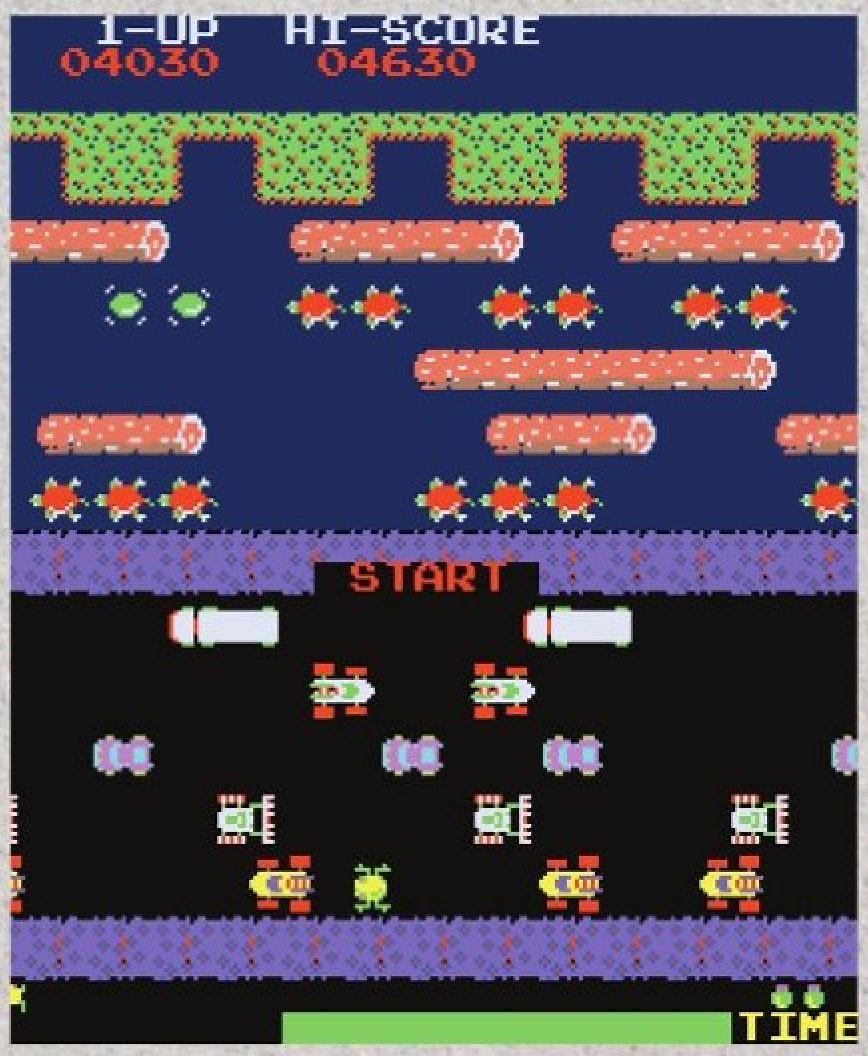
Your aim in *Frogger* is to get your three frogs from one side of the board to the other. A die is rolled at the beginning of each player's turn, and they can use the numbered results to move their frogs the shown number of spaces, or move cars and logs to run over their opponent's frogs. Rolling a log lets you flip a log over, possibly revealing the fly underneath, while rolling a frog causes all frogs in play to move forward two spaces, providing they're not blocked by cars or other frogs. Landing on a log with a fly on it immediately moves your frog forward an additional two spaces. Clear the motorway and the river with all three frogs to win.

HOW IT PLAYS

Surprisingly well, actually, even if the board itself is a little fiddly to set up due to its annoying bendy barriers. There is a fair amount of strategy involved in *Frogger*, as moving frogs, logs and cars is all shared off a single die roll. You therefore have to decide whether you should simply try to leg it across the game board as quickly as possible, or use at least one of your moves to get the drop on your opponent – moving cars into the turning area becomes an invaluable tactic, for example. The end result is that games can occasionally stall as you refuse to move from your last log until you roll a three, but that simply gives your sneaky opponent a better chance of winning.

HOW IT COMPARES

Even though the original *Frogger* is a single-player experience, Milton Bradley's version still does a great job of capturing the spirit of the original Konami coin-op. You're still effectively playing against the computer, only now it's an annoying git who will stop at nothing to send your poor frogs back to their starting swamp, even if it means sacrificing his own critters in the process. We would have liked to see the female frog and sneaky crocodile integrated into proceedings, and an option to simulate the disappearing turtles from the original game would have been a nice touch, but this is still a cracking adaptation that's certainly worth buying.





Donkey Kong



CONTENTS
- 1 game board
- 2 dice
- 1 Donkey Kong
- 4 Mario pawns
- 4 Fireball pieces
- 48 cards
- 12 barrels

'Race to save the Fair Maiden from Donkey Kong'

By: Milton Bradley Games | **For ages:** 7-14 years | **Players:** 2-4

THE OBJECT OF THE GAME

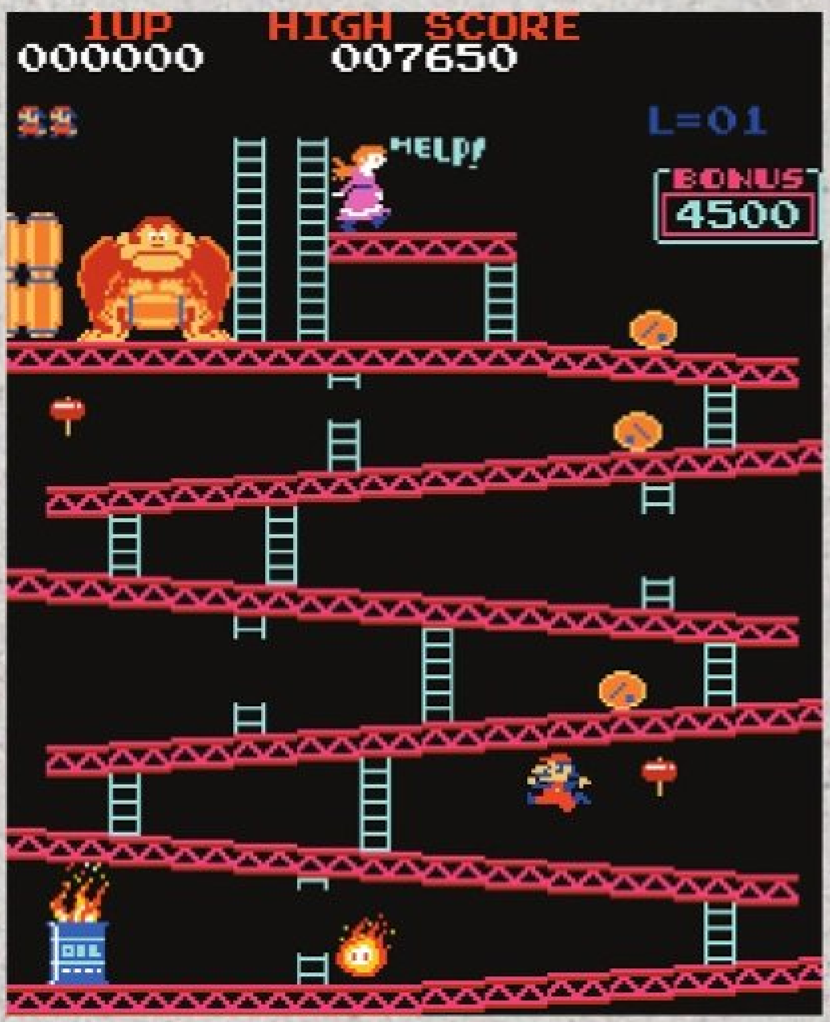
Similar to *Pac-Man*, the game is played using two dice: a red one denotes Mario's movement, while a white one is used for barrels and fireballs. After each turn you use a Donkey Kong Pez dispenser to drop new barrels into the game, unless a Donkey Kong face is thrown, in which case all enemies miss a turn. Each player starts with three action cards – all either a 'Jump' or 'Hammer' card – and each has a point value ranging from 100 to 400. Players can earn additional cards each time they land on a red dot. If a player comes up against a barrel, they are forced to either destroy it using the Hammer card or jump over it using the Jump card, and this allows them to bank the points on that card. If they have no cards, as a penalty each of their opponents gets to take another card from the pack.

HOW IT PLAYS

Despite the front of the box clearly stating that you 'race to save the fair maiden from Donkey Kong', upon playing you quickly realise that this isn't really the aim at all. Skewing the core goal of the arcade game, the ultimate objective isn't to save Pauline from the clutches of Donkey Kong before your fellow man, but rather to bank the most points before she is rescued. Saving her awards you a sizable 500 points, which, while a generous reward, in no way ensures that you walk away from a game victorious. *Donkey Kong* therefore feels pretty flawed, as winning is generally based around sharking the red spots on the board to obtain action cards to use on the barrels.

HOW IT COMPARES

In one respect, *Donkey Kong* is a faithful board game adaptation. All the core elements and mechanics from the coin-op's iconic first stage are well represented: the barrels, the hammer power-up and even the fireballs – which, rather nicely, only activate once a barrel has smashed into the flaming oil drum at the bottom of the board. However, the emphasis on earning points rather than rescuing Pauline means the essence of the game feels lost.





Donkey Kong
Before playing, your first order of business is to construct Donkey Kong. Once assembled, you place barrels into his right hand and press down on his left to release them onto the board.

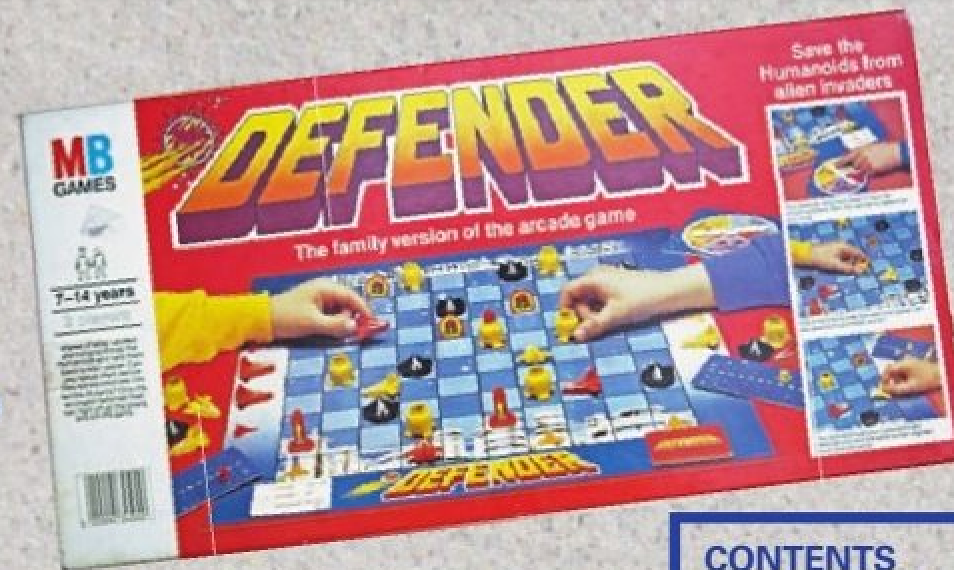
Barrels
As you would expect, barrels are a common obstruction. Hitting one doesn't reset you to the start but does award your opponents more points. Barrels cannot travel down ladders that are occupied by players.

Cards
There are two types of action cards in the game: Jump and Hammer. You must use these to jump, or to destroy barrels to score points.

Mario
There are four Mario playing pieces, and each is a different colour. As such, games always begin with childish arguments about who gets to play using the red and green pawns.

RG GAMES

Defender

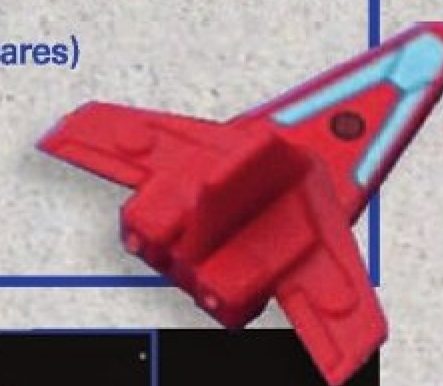




'Save the humanoids from the alien invaders'

By: Milton Bradley Games | **For ages:** 7-14 years | **Players:** 2

CONTENTS
- 1 game board
- 12 Defender ships (6 red, 6 yellow)
- 6 Humanoids/Mutants
- 12 Bombers
- 6 Landers
- 8 score pegs (including spares)
- 1 spinner card
- 1 spinner
- 10 scanner cards
- 2 score cards





THE OBJECT OF THE GAME

As with Eugene Jarvis's original arcade game, the aim of *Defender* is to simply score as many points as possible. Against a second player, you must shoot down enemies or even your opponent's ships, while defending the stationary humans found at the bottom of the board. Players take turns to spin a spinner and follow the given action, which can range from moving your own ship to moving enemies and creating smart bombs, which destroy anything in the eight squares around your ship. Once someone loses all of their six ships, the game is over.

HOW IT PLAYS

The original *Defender* had brutally tough controls that took a surprising amount of time to master. The same can be said for Milton Bradley's board game interpretation. The instructions are a real mess in places, often contradicting ones you've already read, making it extremely tough to work out what's going on. And seven-year-olds are supposed to be able to play this! An initially baffling chart is used to explain how enemies and your ship can move and will also let you know how many points you'll receive for downing enemies. We liked the strategy involved – do you simply try to rack up points, or take out your opponent's ships as quickly as possible? – but it's too laborious and complicated to be fun.

HOW IT COMPARES

Aside from being unable to rescue captured humanoids, *Defender* is surprisingly faithful to Jarvis's hit coin-op. Sadly, however, a good translation doesn't always result in an enjoyable board game, and when it comes to fun, *Defender* just doesn't make the cut. The ambiguous instructions and lengthy setting up that the game requires – it takes a fair old time to play each new scanner card, for example – means that the fast-paced shooter that thrilled gamers in the arcades has been replaced by a creaky cardboard alternative that is more tedious than fun.



Defender Ship
You only have six lives and will have to launch a new ship whenever one of your existing two gets destroyed. When you've lost all six it's game over.

The board
This complicated board features a grid system, showing you where to place enemies at the start of the game. Slow and fiddly to set up, it's an annoying component.

The spinner
You'll spin this at the start of every turn and then play out the indicated instructions. Be sure to give it a good flick with your finger to stop it sticking.

Score card
Use this handy bit of cardboard to track your score. While you're awarded zero points for destroying your opponent's ship, you'll score three for a Lander with a kidnapped humanoid.



Street Fighters
The player pawns are made of cardboard and all 12 world warriors from the original *Street Fighter II* feature.

Cards
These bio cards have no relevance at all in the game, but are useful for finding out who the oldest and youngest fighters are… and who shares the same blood type.

Bison
Bison starts off fully levelled up so can always throw three dice. When a player fights him, his control is assumed by the player who has the weakest fighter.

Buildings
The game board features a number of buildings. These serve no real purpose other than doubling up as a power meter to track your fighter's progress.

Street Fighter II

'Battle the world warriors in this game of strength and courage!'

By: Milton Bradley Games | **For ages:** 7-14 years | **Players:** 2-4

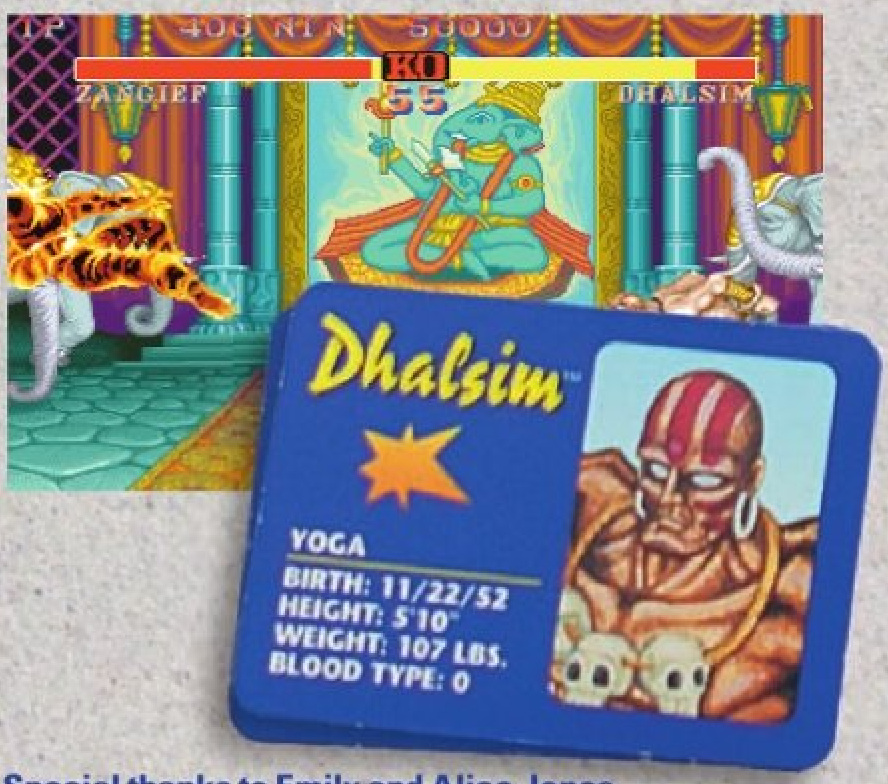


CONTENTS
- 1 game board
- 12 pawns
- 12 data cards
- 4 buildings
- Bison's fortress and wall
- Battle arena
- 8 Power level pegs
- 5 pawn stands
- 4 access tokens
- 7 dice
- 8 building stands

THE OBJECT OF THE GAME
Street Fighter II is a dice combat game with the ultimate goal to either beat M Bison in a fight or fully level up your fighter before he reaches full power. Players can fight the Shadaloo boss at any time, but it's not advised that you do so until you have powered up your fighter to at least level 2. To do this, players take it in turns to roll the dice and land on an opponent's pawn to initiate a dice battle. Winning the fight, which is achieved by rolling a larger number, then adds a notch to their power meter.

HOW IT PLAYS
The eight-page instruction manual certainly gives the impression that the *Street Fighter II* board game is an elaborate and deep one, but the reality couldn't be further from the truth. A play quickly shows the game to be amazingly shallow, and full of elaborate and superfluous parts there to fool fans into thinking the game is more action-packed than it actually is. 90 per cent of turns result in a fight, and if an opponent takes an early lead it can be incredibly tricky to get back into the game. The fact that you can fight Bison at any time also means that games can end abruptly. MB does at least add a sliver of variety with an 'advanced game', which asks players to collect a token before they can battle M Bison. Incredibly advanced, if you ask us.

HOW IT COMPARES
With both the 'street' and 'fighter' part of the game's title represented, we do feel like MB Games took the *Street Fighter II* title a little too literally when coming up with its conversion of Capcom's hit brawler. Combat is also disappointing. While we like the levelling-up aspect, and the fact that your power is represented by how many dice you can throw, special moves would have been a nice touch. It's a pretty watery translation, to be honest.



Special thanks to Emily and Alice Jones and Mat Hoddy for lending us Pac-Man



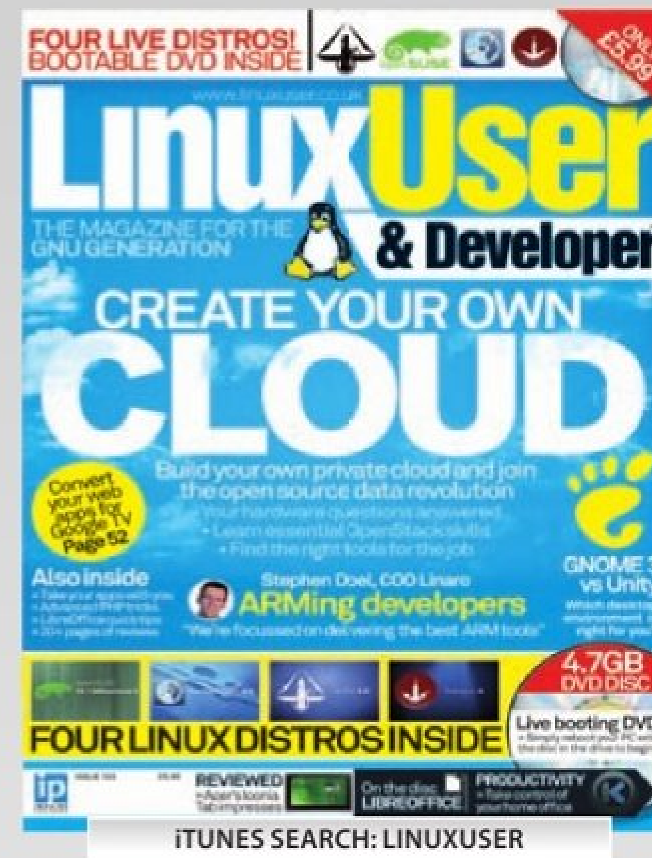
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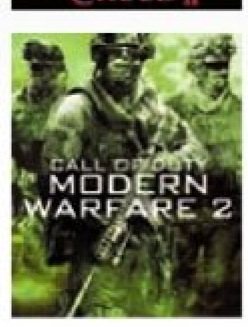


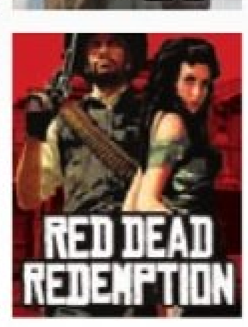
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Galaga
30th
Anniversary

Darran Jones celebrates 30 years of Galaga by interviewing its creators about the long-running franchise, and clearing up that murky Galaxian/Galaga connection

The more learned Retro Gamer reader is no doubt wondering why Namco is celebrating *Galaga*'s 30th birthday this year. After all, every man and his dog knows that it's the sequel to *Galaxian*, and was released two years after Namco's bold new shoot-'em-up took on Taito's *Space Invaders*. That's the story everybody knows. Right?

Well, according to Namco's Shigeru Yokoyama, the reason for celebrating *Galaga*'s birthday and not *Galaxian*'s is simple – *Galaxian* may well share many elements with *Galaga*, it might even feature the same insectoid enemies, a virtually identical logo treatment and get included in new *Galaga* compilations, but that's where the similarities end.

"*Galaxian* and *Galaga* are completely different games," he tells us. "*Galaga* started out because we wanted to create one more space shooter that was like *Galaxian*, and we were actually using the same arcade board as well. After we started using the new board, the spec became better, so we began to create a brand new product proposal. Unlike *Galaxian* where it's rather a stoic game of weaving through enemy curtain fire, *Galaga* became a game that even beginners could easily play in order to relieve their stress."

It's rare that you get the opportunity to question Japanese developers, so the *Galaxian*/*Galaga* conundrum was high on our agenda, even if the provided 'official' answer isn't likely to change anyone's opinion anytime soon. Let's not forget, a version of *Galaxian* currently features on Namco's recent iOS compilation, and skinned *Galaxian* sprites can be used in the rather spiffy *Galaga Legions DX*, so to call them completely different franchises seems a bit strange. So consider *Galaga* a successful reboot rather than a true sequel.

Regardless of whether Namco considers *Galaxian* and *Galaga* to be two separate entities (and we're pretty confident that they share more than just the same original hardware board) it's impossible to talk about the history of *Galaga* without mentioning the impact that *Galaxian* had on both the *Galaga* franchise and the genre itself.

Before *Galaxian* there was *Space Invaders*. A coin-guzzling phenomenon so successful it caused a Yen shortage in Japan, Taito's arcade game was unstoppable, and created a franchise that, thanks to digital services, is still going strong today. *Galaxian* was Namco's answer to Taito's massively popular shooter, and while it didn't have the same cultural impact, or swelled Namco's coffers in quite the same way (even though it was still a massive success) it's nevertheless a far better game.

Unlike *Space Invaders* and its many clones, *Galaxian* sported glorious true RGB colour. There was no coloured cellophane on display here, no using painted backdrops in collaboration with black and white sprites – just true glorious colour that made arcade goers rejoice. The distinct looking insectoid aliens were just as ominous as those dreamt up by *Space Invaders* creator Tomohiro Nishikado, while the screeching sound effects and ear-splitting wails that accompanied the aliens flying into battle were a revelation.

For all its aesthetic splendour it was the superb gameplay that really made *Galaxian* stand head and shoulders above its competitors. The antagonists of *Space Invaders* and its ilk were slow, lumbering adversaries who would dutifully march from left to right – slow and predictable, but ultimately still deadly if their bullets came into contact with you. Four handy bunkers protected you from the carnage for a limited time, giving you breathing space while you collected your thoughts and your trigger skills.

Galaxian, on the other hand, was a far more dangerous beast. Boldly dispensing with the bunkers that quickly became a staple of the *Space Invaders* franchise, *Galaxian* left you in no doubt that it was just you against the incoming aliens. To make matters worse, this new breed of enemy was far nimbler than previous adversaries, and while they featured the same original left-to-right march, they also boasted a game-changing swoop attack. The aliens would swoop down in an erratic attack, blanketing the screen with bullets and causing you to have massive heart convulsions as you desperately tried to move out of their way. It was a startling moment for videogames and had more impact because of the screeching wails that accompanied each frenzied assault.

These bombing runs also ended up being one of the first examples of the popular 'risk and reward' system that is now prevalent in many arcade-themed games. *Galaxian* rewarded you with a set amount of points if you shot aliens down while they were in formation at the top of the screen. Catch them on the wing and the scores for most would double, giving



»[Arcade] Namco of Japan is adamant that *Galaxian* isn't an official prequel to *Galaga*, while Namco of America says otherwise. We'll side with the original creators.



»[Arcade] One of the best elements of *Gaplus* was its fun bonus stage that allowed you to juggle aliens.

huge scoring potential, providing you were able to weave past their curtain of bullets. The biggest reward, however, was saved for the yellow Flagship alien, which would fly down accompanied by two escorts. Shooting it mid-flight granted you 150 points, netting it with one escort earned you 200, while shooting it down and ignoring its escorts earned you 300. Take out the flagship after you had successfully downed its wingmen earned you a massive 800 points, and nerves of proverbial steel. It's an amazingly complex score system, more so when you consider its closeness to *Space Invaders*, and it would only go on to expand in its intricacy as the *Galaga* series progressed.

This extra intricacy was quickly introduced thanks to Namco's *Galaga*, which arrived in 1981, the same landmark year that produced a bevy of fantastic arcade games. On the surface, *Galaga* looked identical to the shoot-'em-up that proceeded it, but in terms of gameplay and structure it's a completely different beast. The insect theme continues (they're both from the same planet, Galaga, after all) but details are more exaggerated than in *Galaxian*, giving the game a far more cartoon-like and friendlier look.

The ship itself has been greatly overhauled and is now able to fire multiple bullets at a time. These extra bullets are handy, as this new terror is far more deadly than the swooping foes of *Galaxian*. Before joining up in formation at the top of the screen, enemies arrive in dizzying attack patterns. Shoot all the foes that make up a formation and you'll earn a nice bonus, but it's incredibly hard to do on early attempts. At first, these enemies won't actually fire at you (making it slightly more accessible than *Galaxian*) but as the stages progress you'll have to be incredibly careful when attacking, as it's all too easy to get taken out by a stray bullet. It's the same risk and reward system of *Galaxian*, but taken to a deadly new level.

"It's impossible to talk about the history of Galaga without mentioning the impact that Galaxian had on the genre"

Once all enemies are on screen they'll begin to take part in conventional bombing runs. Well, we say conventional, but these new foes are far more dangerous adversaries, boasting a repertoire of dangerous attack patterns and even coming back on screen for one final deadly pass, making careless collisions a frequent occurrence. By far the biggest addition to the enemy attack waves, though, is the flight pattern of the bosses. In addition to requiring two shots to destroy, bosses can also fire out a devastating laser beam. If caught it sucks up your current fighter and the boss flies off, potentially robbing you of a much-needed life (although it is possible to shoot your way out with a well-aimed shot). "We were thinking that we would need to use a new variation in the enemy's attack, so we got the idea of the Tractor Beam from a movie that we were watching," continues Shigeru. "Unfortunately, I can no longer remember the name of the movie."

Once he had captured your ship, the boss would fly back into formation and continue his runs. Time your fire incorrectly and you'd hit your ship, thereby robbing yourself of a precious life and making your task that much more difficult. Shoot the boss, however, and your ship would not only be returned to you, but be added to your existing craft, greatly amplifying your firepower. The beauty here, however, is that the additional ship makes you a far easier target for the incoming aliens. Again, it's risk and reward at its simplest, but it works perfectly.

"When we thought of the tractor beam, we also came up with the idea that we wanted to take back the fighter that had just been taken hostage," explains Shigeru about the innovative play mechanic. "To us, the thought of only getting a life for the fighter you just took back was boring, so we came up with the scenario of the dual fighter. It became a good balance of increasing the power and the area of attack, making it much easier to destroy enemies."

Perhaps the best aspect of *Galaga*, though, was its highly addictive challenge modes. One of the earliest examples of a bonus stage, aliens would fly on screen in giddy flight patterns. They had no interest in ramming you and didn't fire back, so it was a simple opportunity to take a quick breather and rack up some additional points. Interestingly this smart little addition wasn't originally planned, with Shigeru simply telling us, "We came up with the bonus stage via a hint from an incidental bug." So one of the best aspects of *Galaga* actually started off as an annoying glitch.

Whilst not being as successful as *Galaxian*, *Galaga* was still a huge hit for Namco and it wasn't long before *Gaplus* arrived on the scene. *Gaplus* added numerous new additions to the *Galaga* format, with the most significant being the ability to move your ship in any direction. You were no longer confined to the X-Axis, but this new freedom





»[Arcade] Successfully shoot all three scorpions in *Galaga* to be rewarded with a nice bonus.

A Mini Making Of Galaga Dimensions





With a brand new iteration of Galaga due out for the 3DS, we asked Namco's Hideo Yoshizawa how the long-running franchise was being adapted for the new format

How does *Galaga* benefit from the 3D technology of the 3DS?
Hideo Yoshizawa: Players can experience the liveliness of the enemy Galagas coming towards them as if they were really in the cockpit of a spaceship. I believe it's the title that has best used the amusement of stereo vision out of all the other 3DS games released thus far.

Where did the concept for *Galaga 3D Impact* originate?
HY: *Pac-Man & Galaga Dimensions* was created by the concept of making the most of the features of the Nintendo 3DS. *Galaga 3D Impact* started out to utilise the best of the 3D functionality, which is the most prominent characteristic of the 3DS. The feature of using the gyro sensor for the camera control, which is actually a central feature in *Galaga 3D Impact*, was not thought of at the beginning of development. When we were still in the experimenting phase of development, we tested it out and felt that it was new and people would be able to feel realistic sensation never experienced before, so we started to create the game control focusing on it. It was difficult, but I feel that it was a good decision at the end.

What are the benefits of turning the series into an on-rails shooter?
HY: We wanted to make the game as simple as possible, because if we include complicated movement controls, we would not be able to have the player enjoy the 3D world that we wanted them to. Also, the appeal of an on-rails shooter was verified enough, as with *Galaxian³* and *Star Blade*, for example. I believe it is appropriate when designing since it is easy to control how to show the scenes or the tempo of the game.

What's been the biggest challenge while creating *Galaga 3D Impact*?
HY: It was very difficult to think of where to place everything within the 3D atmosphere. For example, even taking the shield gauge, for a normal game it could be shown anywhere simply on screen, but we needed to think of where to place it with care for this game, because we have to know where the player will be concentrating, taking the depth into consideration. Another example is, when the player is looking on the enemy in the back row, text shown in front will be in their way – so we needed to make revisions numerous times due to these problems. Also, since there is a difference in how the 3D is seen from person to person, especially when turning, it was troublesome deciding where to put the base line for the camera to the very end.

Why are you featuring *Pac-Man* within the compilation?
HY: Out of the Namco oldies, these two titles are still very popular worldwide. *Pac-Man* had its 30th anniversary last year and this year is *Galaga*'s 30th anniversary, so the concept came up to create a memorial product to link the two titles.



» [Xbox 360] *Galaga Legions* kept the core concept of *Galaga*, but multiplied it by a 1,000. Beware the constantly attacking swarms.

of movement did come at a price. You became even closer to incoming enemy attacks, making an already tough game even more difficult.

"There is a limit to the gameplay you can provide when just using a side scroll similar to *Galaxian* and *Galaga*," began Shigeru when we asked him about the introduction of your ship's new movement. "In order to give the player gameplay with more freedom, and give players more strategy and sensation through the gameplay, so we decided to add vertical movement."

It wasn't the only new trick that *Gaplus* had up its sleeve. One of its best power-ups was the ability to use your own version of the tractor beam. Insanely powerful, and with the concept later adopted and expanded upon for *Galaxian Legions*, it enabled you to capture up to four enemies that would then act as wingmen until they were shot down by their still free brothers. Another smart addition to *Gaplus* was that Namco gave the challenge stage a complete overhaul, where enemies could be constantly juggled in order to spell out a bonus. It's a cool little touch that came about due to Namco demanding more skill from the player. "We aimed at shaking up *Galaga* and the change in the challenge stages came from that same desire," continues Shigeru. "It was designed to allow players to gain more points by boasting about their control skills. At the time, *Galaga* was made so that if you memorized the patterns and you had a dual fighter when entering the challenge stage, it was all too easy to achieve a perfect run."

And yet even with these additional bonuses and enhancement, *Gaplus* (which was later given the name *Galaga 3* in a subsequent revision) failed to set the arcades on fire and lacked the charm of its predecessor – mainly due to it being too darned hard. There's a severe difficulty spike after the first challenge stage, which is an absolute pig to pass and it just gets more unfairly demanding as levels progress. *Gaplus* is certainly an interesting addition to the *Galaga* cannon, but it's a difficult game to love.

There was no such problem with Namco's next offering however, and even now, some 24 years after its original release, it remains the best game in the series; effortlessly combining the blueprints of previous *Galagas* with brand new gameplay mechanics that make it impossible not to love.

Galaga '88 saw Namco throwing everything and the kitchen sink into the existing *Galaga* formulae and, amazingly, it all stuck.

First off you could decide to start with a single ship and two in reserve, or a Dual ship with just one to fall back on, which emulated the capturing elements of past *Galagas*. Namco upped the risk and reward factor significantly in *Galaga '88* by allowing you to shoot up to two captured fighters, allowing for an awesome upgraded ship that made it far easier to take down the attacking hordes. Granted it was incredibly hard to pull off, but perseverance definitely paid for those willing to take the risk. There were a huge number of new enemies added to the game as well; all with their own unique attack patters that would test even the best reflexes. Some enemies combined with others to create larger versions, while others would explode into smaller formations of enemies, which would net bonus points if they were all destroyed.

Galaga '88 was the first game in the series to introduce 'proper' bosses, who could be found waiting at the end of each area. As deadly as they were cute, these huge critters soaked up a massive number of bullets and could prove to be a real pain to take down. Perhaps the most significant introduction to the series was the new alternate routes and endings that you could play though, which greatly added to it's longevity. "The reason for putting in the alternate routes was to avoid repetition like in *Galaga*," reveals Shigeru when we asked him about the brand new game mechanic.

The forgotten shooters



There were a massive number of shoot-'em-ups released in 1981, but many of them never enjoyed the same long-term success as Galaga. We let off a 21-gun salute for those shooter heroes who are long gone but never really forgotten (all right, most of them are)

VANGUARD

Developer: TOSE

Vanguard is a superb little shooter that takes elements from other popular games of the time, but still manages to feel refreshing and new. In addition to being able to fair in four distinct directions, you can secure energy pods that allow you to careen into other ships and destroy them for a limited period of time. It's a clever concept that's heightened by the use of multi-scrolling throughout each level, and challenging attack waves.



ASTRO BLASTER

Developer: Gary Shannon/ Barbara Michalec

Astro Blaster is an amalgamation of other popular shooters. It features the cool voice-synthesis of *GORF*, the varied attack patterns of *Galaga* and the fuel consumption of *Scramble*. Despite of this, it remains entertaining thanks to its slick visuals, challenging enemy waves and a cool 'Warp' button that, for a limited time, allows you to slow down enemies and their laser fire while maintaining your own.



DEFEND THE TERRA ATTACK ON THE RED UFO

Developer: Uko

This was develepor Uko's last game. Sadly, it's not much of a swan song, stealing ideas from other titles (nearly all the sound effects are from *Galaxian*) and coming off amateurish as a result. The idea of a UFO that occasionally turns invisible is a nice touch, but it's not enough to save what is a fairly mediocre shooter.



COSMIC AVENGER

Developer: Universal

We've got absolutely no idea if Universal's *Cosmic Avenger* was released before or after Konami's *Scramble*. What we do know is that it's an ace little shoot-'em-up that features impressive graphics, interesting play mechanics and a nippy pace. A handy marker at the top of the screen shows your progress, while tanks and UFOs constantly harass you. Tough, but very satisfying.



"We wanted to give players an increased choice, as we wanted them to play longer."

The plan worked and *Galaga '88* turned out to be a massive hit for Namco, although interestingly, few home consoles and computers received a home-port at the time. It also turned out to be one of the last significant releases to bear the *Galaga* name, at least as far as the arcade scene was concerned.

Galaxian^3 appeared in 1990 and not only introduced polygons and on-rail shooting to the Galaga formulae but also started off as a completely different game entirely. "At first [*Galaxian*^{3}] was developed as an action game for 28 people for a special event in Japan," explains Shigeru. "The small version was created so that it would fit into game arcades." Aside from the experience of sitting in a huge cabinet, it does nothing other than sully the name of the franchise and spread more confusing over Namco's insistence that *Galaga* isn't a sequel to *Galaxian*. The following decade did little to change this trend and there were few key moments in the franchise (read Stuart Campbell's excellent Definitive guide in issue 33 for more info).

The missing *Galaga 2* turned up as a surprisingly enjoyable Game Gear release, *Galaga Arrangement* was released in arcades (inside a special cabinet with *Xevious* and *Mappy*) and played more like a long exhausting gauntlet of *Galaga* bonus stages. while additional variations on the core *Galaga* gameplay turned up on the Game Boy Color as *Galaga: Destination Earth*, the delightful mobile game *Galaxian Mini* and an obscure plug-in TV game called *Gaplus Phalanx* that was only ever released in Japan.

By far the most interesting addition to the *Galaga* series during this period were the amazingly obscure *SD Gundam Over Galaxian*, which was a crossover release that featured Bandai's famous mechs and *Galaga: Destination Earth*, a polygon 3D shooter for the PlayStation created by the one and only Raffaele Cecco. Sadly, Namco were unable to give us any new information on these two games.

Galaga's quiet period continued during the early 2000s with very few high points. The fact *Galaga Arrangement* appeared on the *Namco Museum Battle Collection* is particularly interesting. For starters, it's a completely different game to the arrangement version that came out in arcades in 1995. Fast paced and with some fantastic bosses, it's a solid addition to the series, but is also important due to the Korean version referring to *Galaxian* (which is also featured on the compilation) as *Old Galaga*. Thereby further confirming our suspicions that *Galaga* is more a reboot of *Galaxian* as opposed to an out-and-out sequel.

The confusion continued when Namco decided to give the title *Galaga Remix* to two completely different games. *Galaga Remix* was released in 2007 as part of Namco's *Museum Mix* compilation. It's an interesting take on the *Galaga* theme, by which we mean it's nothing like traditional *Galaga* games. A small Pac-Man rolls across a series of elevated tracks and you must use the Wii Remote's pointer to protect him from incoming alien attacks. Featuring the same on-rails gameplay that had featured in *Galaxian*^{3}, *Galaga Remix* is a diverting enough shooter, but doesn't really feel like a 'proper' *Galaga* game.

The iOS *Galaga Remix* is far better in terms of tone and styling (it features both the arcade game and a brand new adaptation) but does fall down slightly due to the control implementations that Namco were adopting at the time.



» [Arcade] Shoot the alien controlling this ship and you can add it to your current fighter, greatly increasing its firepower.

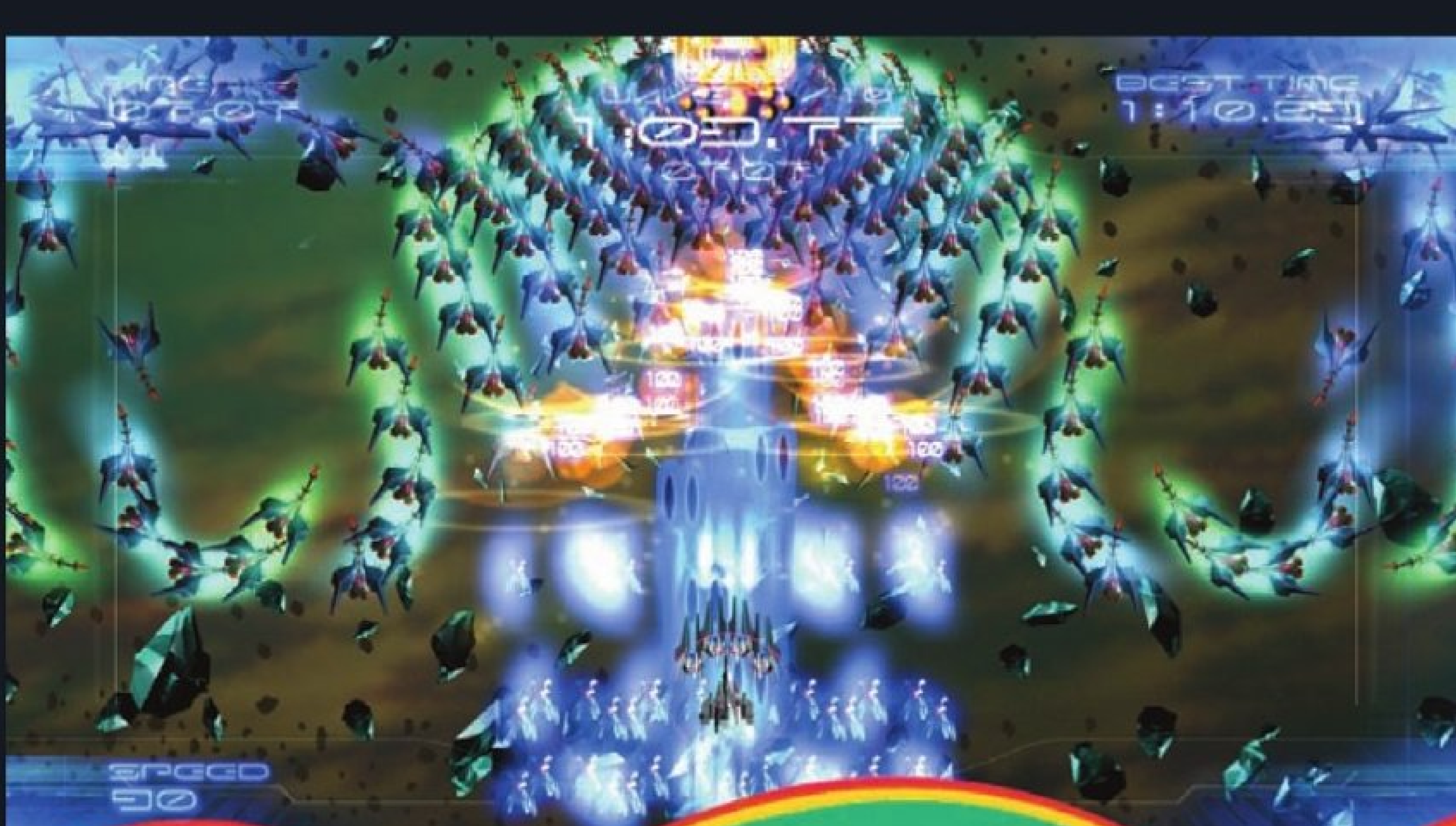
"Galaga '88 saw Namco throwing everything and the kitchen sink into the existing Galaga formulae, and amazingly, it all stuck."

Galaga Legions was the next significant addition to the *Galaga* cannon, and was a huge improvement over other titles that had tried to take the franchise into new directions. Taking the theme of *Galaga*, it upped the ante by delivering waves and waves of fast attacking aliens that didn't let up for a second. A clever touch was that you were sometimes able to cause the alien invaders to switch sides, greatly boosting your firepower and given you a fighting chance against the attacking legions. A sequel was recently released on Xbox Live Arcade (and is reviewed on page 96) and successfully builds upon the fast-paced action found in its predecessor. There's a greater emphasis on time, but it remains a thoroughly enjoyable addition to the franchise that all fans should consider downloading.



Another solid addition, which was released to tie in with *Galaga*'s anniversary, is the rather impressive *Galaga 30th Collection* that was recently released on iOS. Learning from the mistakes of *Galaga Remix*, it features precise controls for all four games (*Galaxian G30th Edition, Galaga G30th Edition, Gaplus G30th Edition* and *Galaga '88 G30th Edition*) excellent new scoring mechanics, achievements and much more. Available for free from the App Store, it comes with *Galaxian G30th Edition*, with the additional three games being available as in-app purchases. To further mire the *Galaga*/*Galaxian* connection, the associated blurb on iTunes explains that *Galaxian* is considered to be the first game in the *Galaga* series (although this could be a Western error) which is probably the closest we'll ever get to the news that *Galaga* was an official 'reboot'.

And that's where our *Galaga* story ends. A brand new compilation, *Pac-Man* & *Galaga Dimensions,* is due out shortly on the 3DS and will offer 3D takes on both franchises, including a new on-rails shooter for *Galaga*, but it's too early to say if it will improve on the standards set by both the 1981 original and the excellent *Galaga '88.* What we do know is that Namco's successful franchise has entertained us on and off for the good part of three decades. An impressive achievement by anyone's standards.



THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home





IN DEPTH

» Killing scores of enemies is made relatively simple thanks to the game's intelligent controls; you can fire your weapon in eight ways, but holding down the fire button locks your line of fire.

» *Shock Troopers* enables you to play through the game as either one character or as a team of three made up from the eight distinctly different characters in the game.

» As well as being full of variety – one second you're blasting through forest, the next you're scaling a rock face – the game gives you three different routes to the enemy base.

SHOCK TROOPERS

■ **Developer:** Saurus ■ **Year:** 1997 ■ **Genre:** Run-and-gun

■ **We come by plenty of run-and-gun games when writing The Unconverted. Most of them are entirely derivative, suggesting why many were never converted to home computers and consoles. Occasionally, though, a real gem comes along that leaves us flummoxed as to why it wasn't snapped up, its sprites cloned, gameplay milked and license used to churn out myriad sequels across multiple gaming platforms.**

Shock Troopers is one such game. A fantastic run-and-gun game from Saurus, it remained an exclusive release for the Neo Geo MVS and sadly never received an AES release, let alone a truncated port on Super Nintendo or Mega Drive. The only way for you to play the game back in the day was to get your hands on a consolised MVS and a copy of the game (not terribly easy), or find an arcade hip enough to have the coin-op (probably more difficult).

Shock Troopers is a typical eight-way shooter, but one with a few interesting features that help to elevate it above most other games in the genre. It shares a lot of similarities with *Mercs*, and isn't particularly subtle about it. The first section of *Shock Troopers'* mountain route stage, for instance, plays like a homage of the first stage of Capcom's *Commando* sequel, with the heroes blasting a path through a mountain pass, mowing down soldiers like Rambo, and blowing huts into smouldering heaps with just a few bullets, before a ridiculous gunfight against a jet plane.

But while *Shock Troopers* borrows liberally from many run-and-gun games before it – including everything from *Commando* to *Ikari Warriors* – and visually could almost pass as a top-down *Metal Slug* spin-off due to its impressive animation, it certainly isn't short of a few novel ideas of its own. Not only does *Shock Troopers* offer you three routes with their own stages to reach the enemy base, but also eight distinctly different mercenaries to take into battle, adding even more variety to its gameplay. Perhaps the most novel aspect of *Shock Troopers* is the option to either play through the game as a 'Lonly Wolf' [sic] or as a team, flitting between three characters of your choosing on the fly, and with all three sharing a single life bar.

Add to all of this some awesome firepower, imaginative set-pieces and memorable bosses, and *Shock Troopers* is a cracking unconverted title, and one of SNK's best kept secrets.



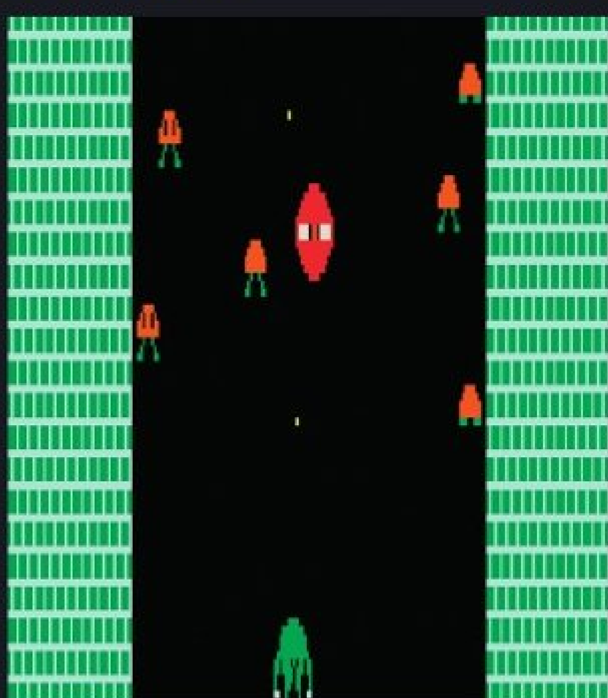
CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

MERCS 1990

No surprise here: we opted for Capcom's *Mercs*, as *Shock Trooper* could be its illegitimate offspring. *Mercs* was converted to a number of machines but it's the Mega Drive port, with its excellent extra mode, that ranks as the definitive home version.

TAZZ MANIA

■ **Developer:** Stern Electronics ■ **Year:** 1982 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up



» [Arcade] We're not sure were *Tazz Mania* gets its name – the character looks more like a frog than a marsupial.

■ **Sharing plenty in** common with *Robotron* is certainly no bad thing, and at first glance *Tazz Mania* almost looks like a kid-aimed parody of the Williams classic *Robotron*; one that sees you control something that looks like Kermit the Frog armed with a machine gun.

However, *Tazz Mania* does introduce its own ideas to the formula that help give the game its own sense of identity and prevent it from feeling like an outright *Robotron* replication. It achieves this by introducing mandatory stationary targets to the mix, re-spawning enemies that bounce erratically around the screen, bullets that ricochet off walls, and arena walls that gradually close in. A really effective gimmick in practice, the gradually shrinking playing field makes for a pretty tense gameplay experience as you race to kill all of the stationary targets, which open up two exits in an arena that has fast become an extremely narrow corridor, and quickly peg it to safety before your character gets squished.

Tazz Mania is a challenging and surprisingly original take on the *Robotron* formula that fans of twitch shooters will almost certainly get a lot of enjoyment from.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

ROBOTRON: 2084 1986

When playing *Tazz-Mania*, it's impossible for your thoughts not to turn to *Robotron*. The Williams shooter classic is clearly the primary inspiration behind its core gameplay, and was converted to a fair few consoles back in the day, including a fantastic Atari Lynx port.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

TRACK & FIELD 1988

With an unsurprising shortage of button-bashing *Monster Truck* games to choose from, we have opted to go for Konami's awesome *International Track & Field*. It's a pretty close contemporary, and was ported to plenty of home machines.



POWER DRIVE

■ **Developer:** Bally Midway ■ **Year:** 1987 ■ **Genre:** Racing



» [Arcade] If you're a fan of button-bashers and vehicle destruction, and have two friends with similar tastes, be sure to check this out.

■ ***International Track & Field*** meets *Monster Trucks* is the best description of *Power Drive*, an obscure multiplayer button-basher from Bally Midway that gave up to three players the chance to compete in a series of big-wheeled challenges (52 according to the game's flyer), ranging from car crushing and weight pulling to simple sprints to the finish line.

Thankfully, the controls help to make it slightly less of a mindless bash-fest, which must be applied differently for each event. For instance, spamming the fire buttons will increase your speed, but coming up against an obstruction on the road requires you to switch from two-wheel to four-wheel drive while using the 'Wheelie' lever to lift the front end over the obstacle.

Admittedly, there's not much to *Power Drive*. The visuals aren't anything special and the control scheme means it's not as instantly accessible as *Track & Field*. However, the gameplay can become pretty addictive and the overall experience really comes into its own in multiplayer. It's an unusual game, and its appeal feels a tad limited owing to its subject matter, which could be the reason it never received a home conversion.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

MAD MOTOR

■ **Developer:** Mitchell Corp ■ **Year:** 1989 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up

■ ***Mad Motor* by** Mitchell Corp is a cycle combat game, a la *Road Rash*, but with a side-scrolling perspective. Set in a *Mad Max*-style post-apocalyptic world, you control a biker who must fend off attacks from enemies ranging from roller-skating gang members to roadhog-riding knights and gorillas dangling from helicopters. And, just when you think it couldn't get any stranger, when your energy is depleted you transform into a werewolf (read: werehog) capable of inflicting stronger attacks.

While the action and visuals grab your attention, sadly the gameplay fails to back everything up. Combat gets tired quickly, the controls are woolly and fiddly (it doesn't help you can only attack enemies vertically), and at times the action can get so chaotic that you never quite sure whether you're taking damage or not.

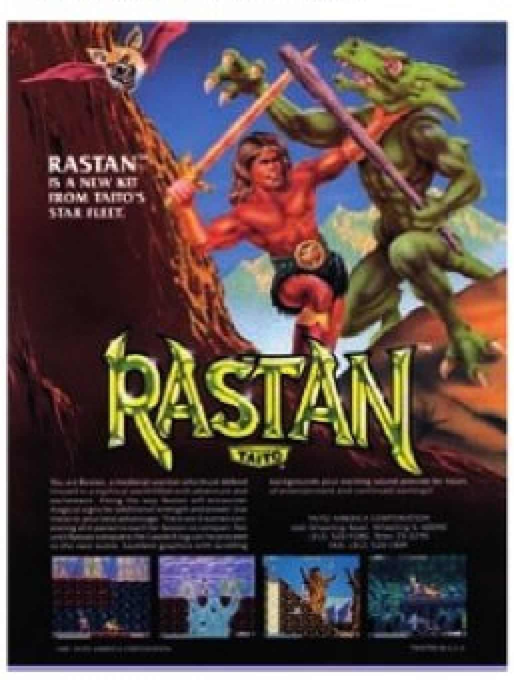
We tried our best to like *Mad Motor*, but we all agreed that, while an interesting take on the beat-'em-up genre, it has some annoying faults that impede its enjoyment.





IN THE KNOW

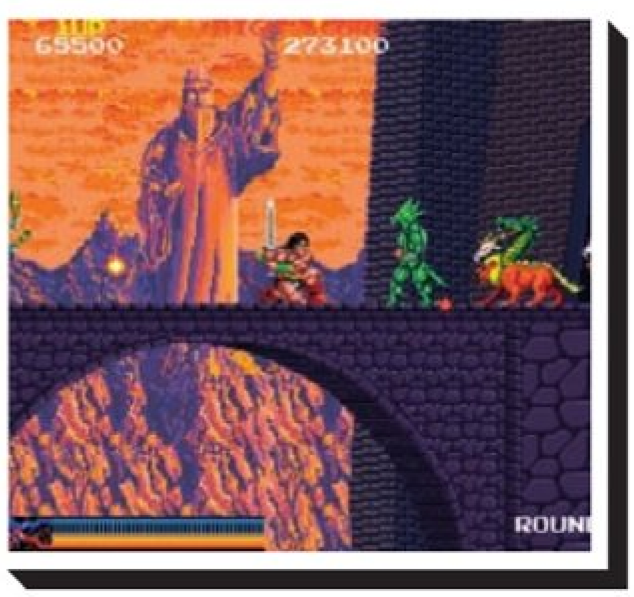
- **» Name:** Rastan
- **» Released:** 1987
- **» Publisher:** Taito
- **» Developer:** In-house
- **» By The Same Developer:** *Arkanoid, Bubble Bobble*



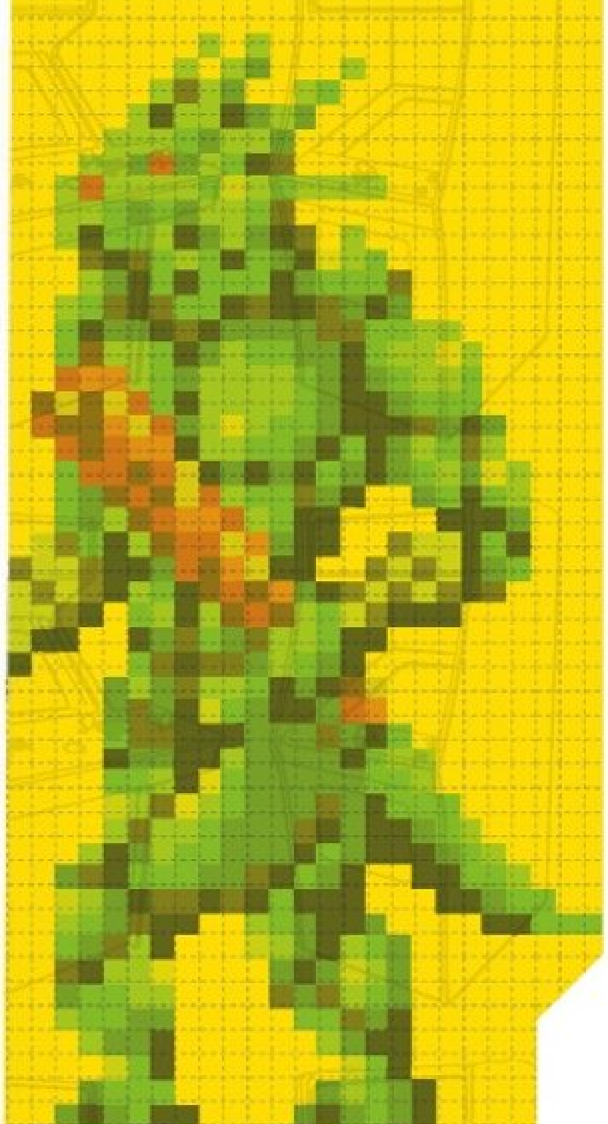
COIN-OP CAPERS

#11 Rastan

Martyn Carroll takes a definitive look back at a classic arcade game and unravels its brilliance through those who know it best







As a new big-budget *Conan* movie hits cinemas, it's fitting that we should feature *Rastan* in this issue. After all, the arcade game is so obviously based on Robert E Howard's fantasy figure that Taito should have gone the whole hog and named it *Rastan The Barbarian*. The game features a sword-wielding, loincloth-wearing man-warrior roaming a desolate landscape, cutting a bloody swath through hordes of mythical creatures. And just like Conan, Rastan's motives are largely self-serving and have nothing to do with saving the land from evil. We're told that he's agreed with the princess to destroy a dragon in exchange for every treasure in the kingdom.

This brief plot is displayed when you begin a game – or at least it is in the original version of the game, entitled *Rastan Saga*, which was released in Japan and parts of Europe. For its US release, Taito America removed this premise completely, making Rastan's actions appear much less mercenary. The US version also features one small gameplay change: in the original, if you stay in one place for too long a couple of bloodthirsty bats appear to hurry you along. Yet in the US release, you are attacked by eight bats, which can sap your strength in seconds.

That's right. Taito America actually made the game harder, which is pretty mad as it was already one of the most difficult coin-ops to ever grace the arcades. Appearances aside, Rastan is surprisingly weak, and chunks of his energy bar drop off if you merely brush an enemy. What's more, coming into contact with water, fire or metal spikes results in instant death. Of course, there's a continue system in place, so providing you have a steady supply of coins you can keep resurrecting our hero and push on a little further each time. However, on the game's sixth and final stage, continues are not allowed, so you have to reach the dragon's lair and finish the job on a single credit. Good luck with that.

Despite the unforgiving difficulty level and repetitive slash-slash-jump gameplay, *Rastan* has a strangely beguiling quality about it. It looks fantastic for a start, with a strong visual style running throughout; the striking background graphics and subtle parallax scrolling really bring the locations to life. The controls are really tight and responsive too, and Rastan is quick and agile enough to fight his way out of the most hopeless situations. All this compels you to battle on, to reach the first castle as the sun begins to set, to avoid the devious traps inside and locate the throne room, to defeat the boss who awaits you there. And with the first level completed, you'll almost certainly want to slog through the forest in level 2 and the caves in level 3 to see what lies beyond. It may be maddeningly frustrating in places, but the compulsion to continue is strong.

If we take prevalence as a sign of popularity, *Rastan* was a big hit for Taito. In the late Eighties the game was a guaranteed fixture in arcades everywhere and also popped up regularly in pubs, takeaways, video shops, leisure centres, caravan parks – you name it. The fact that it was released in the West as an upgrade kit meant that operators could whack the board into any JAMMA-enabled cab and watch the coin box fill up.

Home versions unsurprisingly followed. Ocean licensed the game and released it for the C64, Spectrum and Amstrad CPC in 1988 on its Imagine label. The same year Taito itself developed the game for the Sega Master System and made a few changes in the process, the most obvious being redesigned levels. This version was also released for the MSX2 and Game Gear. Later in 1990, NovaLogic created more faithful versions for the PC and Apple IIGS. In the arcades, a couple of sequels appeared – *Nastar* in 1989 and *Warrior Blade* in 1992. A blond Rastan also appeared as a character in Taito's 1989 arcade brawler, *Champion Wrestler*.

It's not known why Taito didn't license *Conan*. It would later do so for *Superman* and *Rambo*, so we can assume that it wasn't done to avoid paying for the name. Perhaps the rights were held by Datasoft, which released a *Conan* game for home computers in 1984? Whatever the reason, that decision resulted in the creation of a new and very popular videogame hero in the hulking form of Rastan. *

COIN-OP CAPERS
the expert



Rastan is a ridiculously tough game, but there's one man who can complete it on a single credit and still manage to clock up a world record high score of nearly 1.5 million points…

PROFILE
- » **Name:** Cliff Reese
- » **Age:** 35
- » **Location:** Collegeville, Pennsylvania
- » **Key Twin Galaxies World Records:**
  Metal Slug [Arcade] 2,683,030 points
  Raiden Fighters Jet [Arcade] 15,308,468 points

■ Tell us about your relationship with the *Rastan* arcade game.
It's a love/hate relationship. I remember being a kid and playing *Rastan* at one of the arcades in our local mall back in the late Eighties. For its time, the game was amazing. It had great graphics and sound – and what kid didn't want to play as a sword-wielding barbarian? But just seconds after inserting my quarter, small hands ready to inflict carnage on the evil baddies, my game was over. *Rastan* was hard; brutally hard. I tried a second quarter, getting a few steps further, but again, dead in seconds. So, I walked away, only to come back to the game years later. And this time I came for revenge.

I bought a *Rastan* board off the internet, plugged it into my JAMMA-compatible cabinet, and played with the intention of returning the beating it gave me in my youth. After a few months of on-off playing, I mastered the game and finally neared the point of breaking the world record.



» [Arcade] Be careful, as the projectiles can knock you back into the deadly waterfall.

■ So where did you register your high score of 1,485,300?
I heard about an event at a place called Richie Knucklez Arcade Games in New Jersey, the next state over. They were trying to set the world record for the most arcade game records set during a single event. On the very last day of the event, 13 December 2010, they supposedly were a game shy of breaking that record. Richie asked if I'd bring my *Rastan* board to his arcade and make a world record attempt. I thought it'd be a lot of fun to set the record at a live event. I never did find out if the arcade set the record they were going for, but I reached my goal of breaking the *Rastan* world record with 1,485,300 points.

I recorded my game with a video camera and sent the recording off to Twin Galaxies. A week or so later, it was reviewed by a TG referee and made official. I had my revenge and am now the official *Rastan* world record holder.

■ Shawn Witkus's previous record of 787,700 had stood for several years. Why do you think it took someone so long to topple it?
Shawn's score was outstanding and it took a lot of practice and patience for me to beat the record. A reason for the game's incredible difficulty is that Rastan takes damage very easily without gaining even a second of invincibility after being hit. The later levels are crazy, with multiple enemies coming at you from every direction. There are falling rocks and instant death fire pits you have to jump or swing over while lethal fireballs are spurting up at you. It's insanely difficult.

■ How does the scoring work in the game?
There are six levels, and when you beat the final boss, it's over. You cannot continue playing from the start with your score intact, so you have to get as many points as possible within those six levels. There is no timer in the game, so sometimes you do get a breather to think about strategies to get through the hordes of monsters. However, Twin Galaxies prohibits the tactic of 'point leeching'. This is when a player hangs around a level in a game that does not have a timer and continuously kills respawning enemies for massive numbers of points. In order to qualify for the world record on a game like *Rastan* you have to keep moving forward.



■ The Galloping Ghost Arcade website reports that a Richard Schroeder scored 1,978,900 on *Rastan* in March 2011. Are you aware of this attempt, and if it all checks out, will you attempt to top it?
I didn't know about that score. Richard would have to record his attempt so that Twin Galaxies can verify his score. I don't think that high a score is normally possible, but I'm not going to discredit another

Perils and Pitfalls

Even barbarians need to watch their step against the forces of evil

Bothersome bats
These bloodsuckers lurk in caves and castles. Hang around too long and several will attack you.





Rolling stones
Look out for these boulders that fall from the sky and roll towards you. High jump over them.

Underhand swings
The ropes are infamous. Time your jumps and watch out for fireballs and other distractions.





Tricky traps
Rastan must bypass many deadly traps. Getting impaled by these spikes results in instant death.

Slippery slopes
The slopes are a bit of fun at first, but they get much trickier as fire pits and water holes are added.





» [Arcade] Three mythical beasts waiting to feast on our flesh? No problem!



» [Arcade] If you have enough health, it's possible to defeat some bosses by slashing at them wildly.

gamer or anything. Richard must be a very skilled *Rastan* player, and if someday he officially tops my record, I'd be happy to attempt to take it back. Great competition makes playing games even more fun.

■ Besides *Rastan*, which of your arcade high scores are you most proud of?

One of the scores I'm most proud of is being the *Metal Slug* world record holder. I set the record a few years back, but my score was broken near the end of that year. The competition pushed me to master the game and I've since reclaimed the world record in March of this year with a high score of 2,683,030 points.

Another of my favourite games is Atari's *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom*. This is a very hard game and the records are divided up based on which of the difficulties you choose at the start of the game (easy, medium or hard). I've been playing the game for a few years, slowly pushing my score higher and higher. The records on this title have existed for many years, and it was believed that no one would ever top those scores. Well, I have recently broken the world record on not one, but all of the difficulties. I'm the undisputed champ of *Temple Of Doom*! ✱

CLIFF'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

Learn how to survive on Rastan's quest for treasure for longer than 20 seconds

1 ■ TAKE IT SLOW
Rastan moves too quickly for his own good. Since he takes damage so easily from the slightest touch of an enemy and can get hit repeatedly, even by the same monster with no chance to recover, you must progress slowly to avoid injury.

2 ■ PERFECT TIMING
Water and fire pits are lethal. Watch the movements of swinging ropes and moving platforms and time your jumps accordingly. Holding up and jump makes Rastan leap higher. This is useful for getting over pitfalls.

3 ■ WHAT'S YOUR POISON?
You get points in the game for each enemy you kill, the bosses you defeat, and the bonus items that you pick up. If you are playing for score, make sure to actually pick up the red poison vials. Yes, you heard that right. Most players avoid them, but the poison only does a fraction of damage and actually gives the most points out of any of the dropped bonus items.

4 ■ BEST THE BOSSES
Many players get frustrated by the difficulty of the game's bosses. Each boss has a specific attack pattern, but they are generally weak and can be destroyed with only a few hits. Memorise their movements and patterns to beat them quickly and easily.



the sequels

Taito was keen to make sure that Rastan wasn't a one-hit wonder



Nastar
Released: 1989
Sequels are often criticised for retaining too much of the original's look and feel, but here is a good example of why it's not always a good idea to mess with a winning formula. The small and sprightly Rastan has been replaced by a large, lumbering wrestler type who appears to be wearing a nappy – and one that needs changing, judging by the way he walks. Co-op has been added, but with two beefed-up Rastans on screen at once the action becomes too cramped to be enjoyable. Other problems include a reinvention of the original's plot, with Rastan suddenly becoming a noble warrior destined to save 'Rastanian' from a so-called 'wicked group'. This was released in Japan as *Rastan Saga II*, but renamed *Nastar* in Europe and *Nastar Warrior* in the US.



Warrior Blade
Released: 1992
Bearing the subtitle *Rastan Saga Episode III*, this is a much better attempt at a sequel than its predecessor. Borrowing liberally from *Golden Axe*, *Warrior Blade* is a scrolling slice-'em-up rather than an action-platformer. Three fighters are available – sword-swinging Rastan, knife-wielding Dewey or whip-cracking Sophia – and co-op play is again supported. What sets this apart, though, is that the cab features twin monitors positioned side by side, and the extra width ensures that the screen never becomes cluttered. It also allows for some pretty impressive set pieces and boss battles. *Warrior Blade* is a fitting finale to Rastan's arcade adventures.



Barbarian
Released: 2002
This game, released for the PS2, Xbox and GameCube, has a legitimate though tenuous connection to the *Rastan* series. In the West, publisher Titus actually pushed this as a 3D update of Palace Software's old 8-bit *Barbarian* games. Taito, meanwhile, licensed the game and released it in Japan under the silly title of *Warrior Blade: Rastan vs Barbarian Saga*. To justify the *Rastan* link, Taito took one of the game's eight playable characters and changed his name from Dagan to Rastan. In all honesty, it would have been better off releasing an updated home version of the arcade *Warrior Blade* than wasting time and money on this dreary, generic offering.

COIN-OP CAPERS

the machine

Arcade fan Michael B Rich already has an impressive collection of coin-ops, but he couldn't say no when he spotted an unloved Rastan cab for sale on the internet



"I'm 41 years old and I live in Atlanta, Georgia. I'm in the custom electronics business and I've been electronically minded ever since I was a young kid. First one on the block with a computer – that sort of thing.

"A few years ago my wife had a friend that had an old *Galaga* cabaret game that didn't work. I started doing research on how to repair it, and after about a month I had totally restored the game to like-new condition. Since then I have been hooked on finding and restoring my favourite games that I played in the arcade when I was young. There is something about the games from the Eighties. I just love them.

"I found *Rastan* for sale on Craigslist. I called the guy up and went on an hour's drive to go and get it. I found the game wasting away in a warehouse and I paid $200. The first time I turned it on at home it worked for about two minutes, then died and wouldn't turn back on. This game restoration will take some time, but I plan to bring it back to like-new condition and give it a home in my personal arcade."



CONTROLS

The controls were intermittent when I bought it. The buttons did not function; they needed to be adjusted so that they made contact when pressed, and the joysticks needed to be adjusted as well. I have already ordered new buttons and joysticks from Happ Controls. The control panel overlay has tears and is worn. I will be replacing it with a new custom-made overlay.



COIN MECH

When I first opened the cabinet and pulled out the coin bucket it had about $7 in quarters in it as well as a couple of tokens! The coin door looks as though someone broke into the game at some point, so I'm looking for a replacement.



MARQUEE

When I got the game the marquee plexi was broken and the marquee light didn't work. I replaced the broken plexi and light, and now the marquee looks great.



MONITOR

The monitor was working well but had some bad burn-in. The new monitor was $230, and it was very hard to find. I got it from Steven over at Arcadeshop.com. Steven has always given me the best service I could ask for, and they have quality parts at fair prices. The original bezel looks great and I think I will be using it.

CABINET

The cabinet wood is in perfect condition, other than needing a fresh coat of paint. I need to strip it down and repaint it. It was *Rastan* from the beginning, as far as I can tell. It appears that someone purchased the kit for this cabinet when it was new.

PCB

The main PCB had a few solder joints that had popped loose and needed to be re-soldered, as well as a couple of small resistors that were bad. I have cleaned and repaired the PCB and it works great.



developer Q&A

We quiz Ocean coder John Meegan, the man tasked with bringing Rastan to the Commodore 64



How did you get into games programming?
When I started university I finally had enough money to buy a computer, so I got a Commodore 64. I discovered a neighbour, John Stevenson, had bought one too, and we started hanging out together. One day we just decided to make a game together. It was never really planned. We were both completely self-taught doing everything – design, graphics, sound and programming.

How did you come to be working on the Commodore 64 version of *Rastan*?
Short straw. I utterly hated the arcade game when I played it. Bloody tedious and repetitious gameplay. Unfortunately I returned from my dad's funeral to discover Dave Collier had bagged *Combat School* and I was lumbered with the game.

Did you have access to the coin-op during development? Was it housed in Ocean's famous 'Arcade Alley'?
I had access to it all through development. Indeed it was housed in Arcade Alley, which in reality was a dingy corridor housing some arcade machines and QA staff.



How long did the conversion take, and what would you say were the most challenging aspects?
The conversion took about eight gruelling months, including Christmas. The hardest part of the coding implementation was fitting all of the graphics in, co-ordinating all of the trigger points and AI sequences with no source code to reference, and ensuring the eight sprites on a line rule was never broken. The rope sequencing was a dog. The bosses were hard from a size standpoint, as well as establishing what their actual behaviours and combat rules were.

The game suffers from a bug with one of the rope swings, which prevents you from progressing. Was this something that slipped through?
The game was thoroughly tested, but as we missed the pre-Christmas release period, the pressure was on to get it out shortly after. The problem with the ropes was that some of the variables would globally apply, so after a late change it was not impossible that they would all work except one. That would be my fault, not that of QA.

The game was slated in *Zzap!64*, receiving 42% with the gameplay described as "monotonous and frustrating". Do you think the criticism was fair?
Absolutely. It took a tedious but spectacular-looking arcade game and made it a tedious and visually drab game on the C64. The graphics were as good as they could be given the inexperience of the artist Jane Lowe and the limitations of the C64. The music is by far the best thing about it.

If you could go back and start the game from scratch, what would you do differently?
First, I'd demand a technically adept and experienced artist. The poor girl working on this was talented, but she'd never worked on a game, or even a computer. I'd also reserve 64 characters and 1/4 character set just for the ropes. This would greatly compromise the visual quality, but would allow the ropes to be properly implemented, and given how integral the interaction with the ropes is, this had to be done. Next, I'd make the trigger points on a grid and a lookup table in addition to the trigger characters. I'd also video the boss fights and annotate these for easier implementation. Finally, I'd waste no time in ridiculous arguments about how many sprites Rastan should be composed of. Never mind time in creating implementations that then have to be discarded because they are unworkable.

The congratulations message at the end of the game is a bit bizarre. It reads: "THIS GAME RE-ENACTMENTS ONE GREAT EXPLOIT OF PAUL, ALIAS RASTAN THE BARBARIAN. ENJOY HIS NEXT GREAT ADVENTURE IN THE ALL FICTIONAL 'PAUL DEVELOPS THE COBRA SCROLL'." Who's Paul and what's all that about?
When I made this game all those years ago I never imagined we'd ever dissect this! 'Paul' was referring to Paul Owens. He'd just had an interview with *Sinclair User* published, where he claimed to have created the scrolling method for *Cobra* on the Spectrum, whereas it was actually the sole work of the late, great Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith.

What are your memories of Jonathan?
Joffa was a quiet and unassuming boy when I met him. You'd never be able to tell he was the creativity and graft behind all those brilliant Spectrum games as he was so cripplingly shy. The insensitive or jealous would assume this as aloofness or, even further from the mark, a superiority complex. Due to his shyness he was most comfortable with close friends and family. On the few evenings when we managed to harass him to join us for a drink, he'd never talk about what he was working on. Instead he would share his enthusiasm for electronic music, and he'd come alive talking about Vince Clarke's latest project. My thoughts are with his family and friends.

Have you remained in the industry, and are you still in touch with any of your Ocean colleagues?
I'm still in the industry as a consulting producer, based in the US, and recently I saw Jonathan Dunn, John Brandwood and James Higgins. ★

COIN-OP CAPERS
the conversions



Rastan proved to be a popular arcade game for Taito and was released on a number of different home systems. We kneel in reverence to the best efforts, and hack up the rest with our trusty broadsword

02


03


01


01. Apple IIGS [Best Version]
This is a truly impressive conversion that's worth seeking out. If you've ever played the DOS conversion of *Rastan* you'll immediately recognise the Apple II offering, as it's essentially a near-identical port of the impressive DOS version. It maintains the same fast-paced action, great visuals and authentic enemies, bosses and level design. The trump card that the Apple II version offers over its DOS cousin, though, is the inclusion of far better audio. It's still not perfect, but it's a big improvement and easily adds to its overall appeal. A strong conversion indeed.

02. Amstrad CPC
We want to wholeheartedly support the Amstrad version, but we really can't, as it's a pretty average conversion. It certainly looks the part, with a great chunky *Rastan* sprite and suitably large adversaries, and it's surprisingly faithful in layout to the coin-op version as well. The problem here, though, is when Rastan starts moving and lazy programming soon rears its ugly head. The Amstrad was never a great machine if you wanted smooth scrolling, but the lurching visuals of *Rastan* are particularly galling. The screen shakes and stutters, while the general slow speed detracts greatly from the impressive sprites. Ugly bleepy sound effects are the final nail in this conversion coffin.

03. Spectrum
The Spectrum version of *Rastan* was well regarded on its original release, and it's easy to see why. It copies the big bold sprites of the arcade game, is extremely faithful in terms of its layout, and has very good authentic reproductions of the coin-op's enemy sprites and monsters. Most impressive, however, is the sheer speed. Despite the expansive levels and huge sprites, *Rastan* races along at a cracking pace, easily emulating the excitement of the arcade version. The lack of decent sound and multiload lets it down, but this remains an excellent conversion.

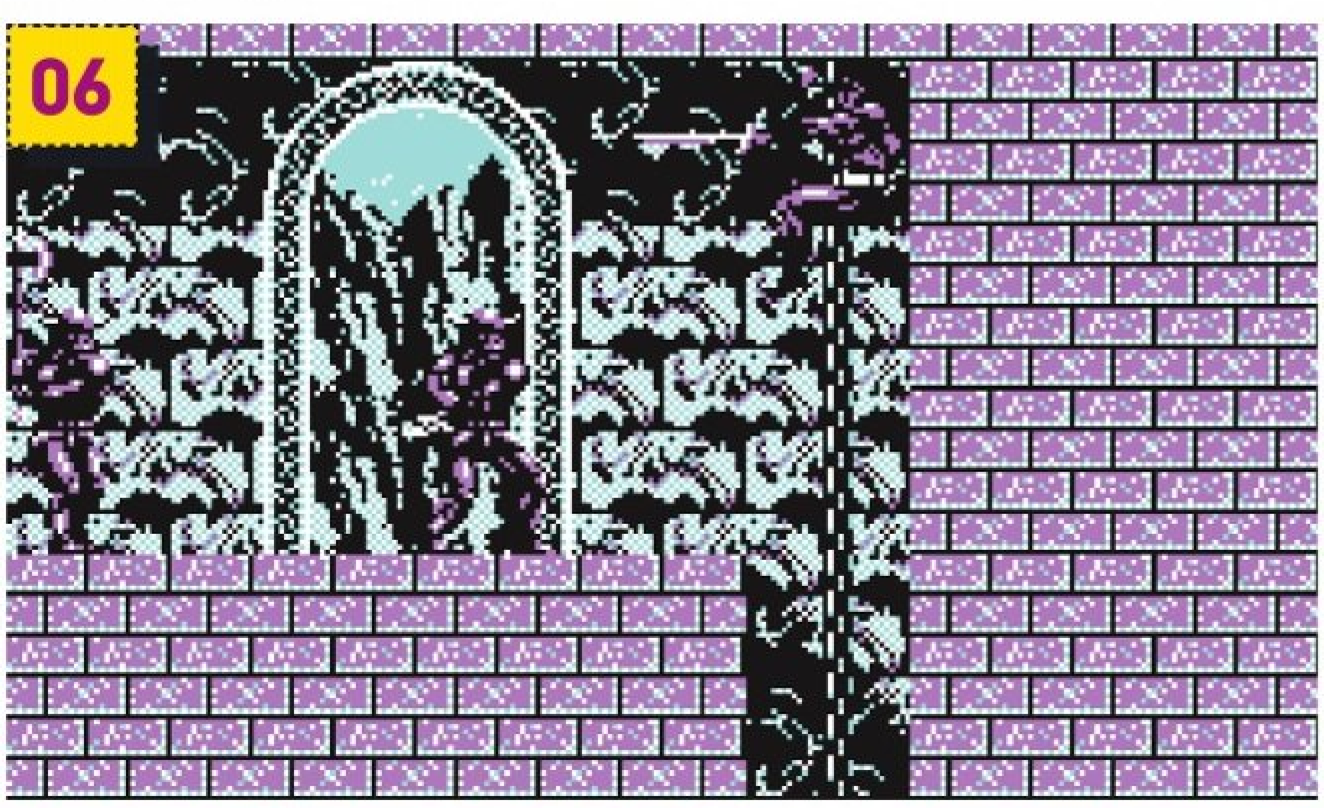
04. PS2/ Xbox/PSP/PC
Okay, we're obviously cheating here, but are including these final versions for completion's sake. In 2005 Taito was bitten by the same compilation bug that had attacked many of its peers, and as a result it released two superb compilations of some of its most memorable arcade games. *Rastan* can be found on the first *Taito Legends* and its PSP counterpart, *Taito Legends Power-Up*. Short of owning the original arcade machine, these are the most authentic versions available.

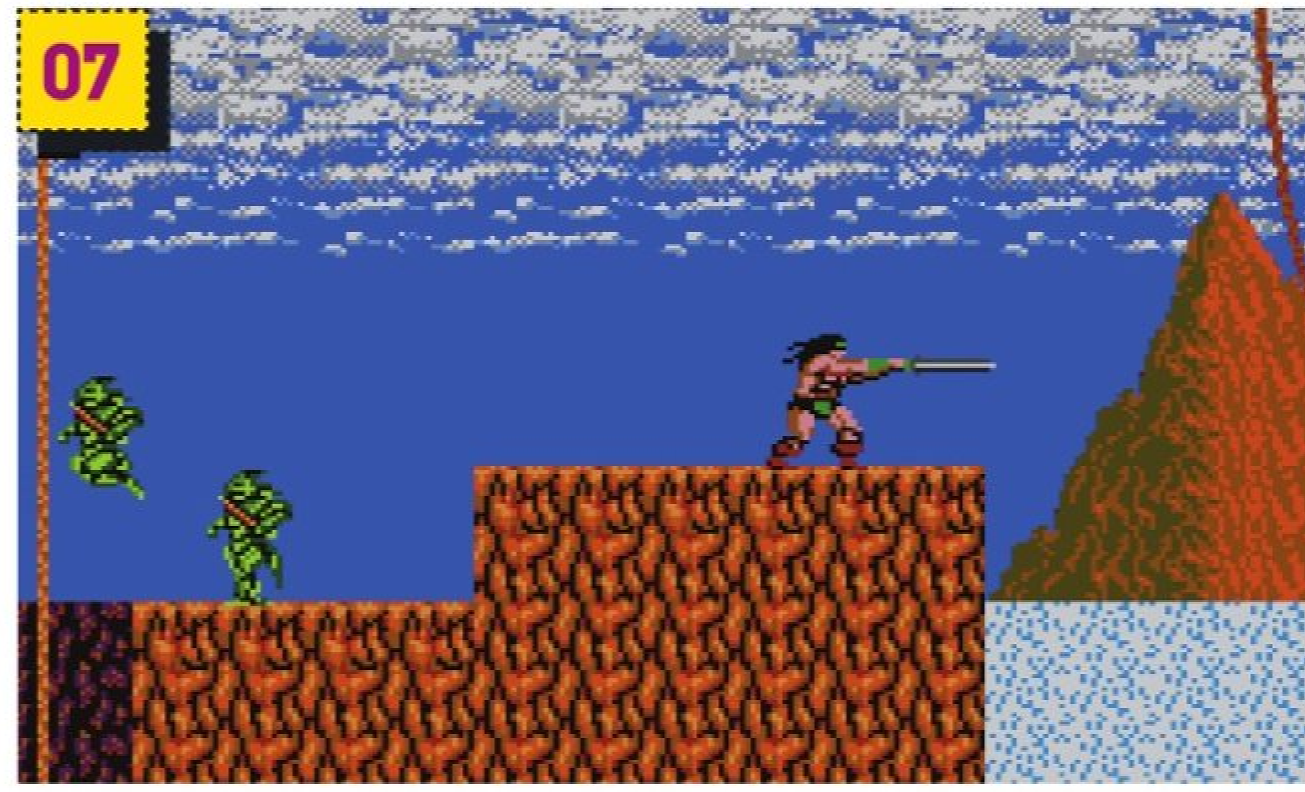
05. MSX2
The MSX2 version of *Rastan* was actually coded by Taito, meaning that the quality of the work on offer is very high. As with the Master System offering, this conversion plays to the strengths of the system itself, so while it shares many similarities with the 8-bit Sega port, a number of changes have been made to ensure that it plays as well as possible on its host machine. This is the only version of *Rastan* that features no physical scrolling and there are fewer enemies on screen, which does mean *Rastan* on the MSX2 isn't as challenging as we'd like. It's another solid effort, though, and highly recommended.

06. PC
There are two versions of *Rastan* on DOS: a full-colour effort and the ugly CGA version we're showing here. In terms of gameplay, they're nigh-on identical and very, very good fun to play. They're faithful to the level design of the original coin-op, and it moves along at a wonderfully hectic pace, giving *Rastan* the same sense of excitement that the original arcade version offered. All the weapons and power-ups seem in place, many of the enemies and bosses are perfectly replicated, and













the relentless action never lets up. In fact, the only thing that really lets this conversion down is that it uses the PC's built-in speaker, meaning the audio is truly atrocious.

07. Master System

Despite the popularity of Taito's coin-op, the Master System was the only home console to receive a version of *Rastan*. It's probably one of our favourite ports, even though it's very different to the arcade original. Graphically it's pretty slick, with bright backdrops that emulate the levels from the arcade game, and detailed but tiny sprites. The levels are far shorter than other versions, but the challenging difficulty means it's not an issue. While this isn't a faithful port, it perfectly captures the spirit of the coin-op.

08. Game Gear

For all intents and purposes, the Game Gear port is exactly the same as the impressive Master System effort, albeit with a few caveats. Only released in Japan, unlike many other Game Gear/Master System conversions, this one has been lazily programmed. There has been no resizing to take into account the Game Gear's lower resolution, so as a result all the sprites look fuzzy and distorted. It's still great, but if you have a Master Gear for your Game Gear, you may as well stick with the Master System version.

09. Commodore 64 [Worst Version]

While it features smooth scrolling and smart sprites, Rastan himself moves incredibly slowly in this port, which makes it hard to deal with the constant stream of enemies. The weapons have no real impact on foes and the difficulty careens from maddeningly simplistic to crushingly unfair, while the collision detection throughout is extremely questionable. We do urge you to check *Rastan* out, though, if only to hear the superb rendition of the theme tune by music maestro Martin Galway.

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come





INFO

- **Featured System:** PlayStation 2
- **Year Released:** 2003
- **Publisher:** Konami
- **Developer:** In-house
- **Key People:** Shuyo Murata (writer/director), Hideo Kojima (producer), Yoji Shinkawa (design/ art director)

GO DEEPER

- **Fans of Kojima's other series, *Metal Gear Solid*, can spot *ZOE 2* art on Otacon's computer screen in *MGS4*.**
- **Leo's mech is named Vic Viper in the game, and it's adapted from the *Gradius* vessel of the same name.**



13. ZONE OF THE ENDERS: THE 2ND RUNNER

The sequel to a game bought mainly for an included demo, ZOE 2 was unfairly ignored, yet managed to bring side-scrolling shooters screaming into the 3D age

THE BACKGROUND

Konami had a sequel in the planning stages, following *Zone Of The Enders'* successful release in early 2001. But that game's sales were inflated by a packed-in demo to the much-anticipated *Metal Gear Solid 2*, which naturally meant a demo-less sequel would have to prove itself on its own terms.

The appointment of Shuyo Murata as director of *ZOE 2* came under interesting circumstances. He was credited in the first game as working on cinematics, yet it was pitching a story for the sequel to producer Hideo Kojima that landed him a job. The story, reportedly, was about a pilot riding the game's central mech, Jehuty, while surviving an addiction to Metatron, *ZOE*'s fictional power source.

While this story wouldn't be used, Kojima liked the idea so much that he decided that Murata was the right creative leader. In an interview for the premium edition of *ZOE 2*, translated by zoneoftheenders.org, Kojima described him as an ideal game designer, "I thought [the idea] was really good. I guess that was when I thought he could [do] this sort of thing. He had the closest type of discipline, or background, to me, so I wanted to see if he could pull it off."

Despite his popularity and reputation in the games industry, Kojima described *ZOE 2* as being very much Murata's project, and that he was taken aback by early builds of the game. A lot of time was spent on the game's semi-anime, semi-realistic look as well, since a goal set for the development team was to make it appear as though it was running on different hardware to the PS2 – Kojima wanted gamers to 'double-take' at the game's powerful visuals, which, to those who bought the underselling game, they did.

THE GAME

ZOE 2 followed up a solid, early PS2 game that was softly received by critics due to its shallowness – it was a classic example of a 7/10 game. This sequel demonstrated a step up in ambition across the board, as everything from cut-scenes to gameplay structure to art direction was completely overhauled,

Things of note



Jehuty returns

At this year's E3 Konami announced that the first two *ZOE* games will be collected and remastered in HD – as will *MGS* – for release on the 360 and PS3 in 2012. Superb!



Fist Of Mars

ZOE 2 would be the last new game in the series to date, but an underrated strategic offshoot, the oddly titled *Fist Of Mars*, was released on the GBA in 2002.



Animated Jehuty

There's also an anime series that tried to build *Zone Of Enders* into a full-blown franchise called *Dolores, i.* For really hardcore fans, it's available on UK DVD.



ZOE 3

Kojima has frequently discussed a third game in the franchise, last mentioned in 2010. The HD compilation certainly bodes well for the franchise's future.



The Shinkawa touch

If there's a visual similarity between *MGS* and *ZOE*, that's because mechs from both series were designed by the hugely talented Yoji Shinkawa.



» [PS2] This visual spectacular is just one of the basic attack moves in *ZOE 2*.



» [PS2] Despite a mixed reception from critics, *Zone Of The Enders: The 2nd Runner* is a notable result of technical achievement in the PS2 era.



What the press thought

games™
Score: 6/10
"Still, this isn't to say *ZOE 2* is a bad game, providing you're not looking for anything too deep or meaningful"



Official US PlayStation Magazine
Score: 9/10
"No other game out there offers such a chaotic yet brilliantly visceral gaming experience"

almost as a reboot with only a few narrative ties to its predecessor. Technically, it stands as one of the most visually impressive games on the PS2, with the fidelity of lighting effects and gameplay speed we'd expect this generation. Along with gorgeous anime cut-scenes, the look of the game struck a middle-ground between 2D and 3D, which produced a unique style. The experimentation with these effects, 2D-style explosions on 3D battlefields being especially cool, makes it striking to look at even now.

Still, it was the imagination of the set-pieces that really brought *ZOE 2* to life, as the game ditched the samey environments of the first game and went about crafting almost every kind of action sequence you could ask for: a furious battle above a train on a crash course, dismantling giant aircraft high above the clouds, as well as pulling a satellite apart and lobbing bits at enemies. Each level is a pure adrenaline rush, pushing the PS2 as far as it can go. One level takes place on an ever-shifting battlefield as Jehuty has to escort a battalion of slow-moving robots against an army of machines, meaning that the player has to strategically keep their colleagues in check while facing a jaw-dropping number of enemies. It jumps from one type of level to the next, carefully increasing the pace and tension as a great action game should.



This painstaking effort to vary the campaign was no doubt a reaction to the criticisms of *ZOE*. Each chapter offers an adrenaline rush, helped along by the sub weapons (read: special powers) you pick up later in the game, the Death Star laser-style Vector Cannon, and a homing missile volley that tears foes out of the sky. Although *ZOE 2* is reasonably brief at around six hours, the game is designed to keep you moving at all times, rarely being able to catch your breath until your surroundings are clear – and the tools you have to accomplish that are so satisfying.

It's a hyperactive and very replayable game, given the colourful *Evangelion*-infused world of the series. The story is just a vessel to take players to the far ends of the universe, showcase exceptionally cool boss fights and a challenging final battle with Anubis, the series' primary antagonist. The final encounter, in fact, is so full of visual flourishes that it looks like it shouldn't be able to run on the PS2, a brilliant close to a game full of marvellous moments like this. Oh, and if that's not enough, there's a 3D Gradius megamix to unlock after you tackle everything in the game.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Zone Of The Enders: The 2nd Runner showed gamers how much creative potential there is in modern 3D arcade shoot-'em-ups, providing great creative minds like Murata and Kojima are involved. Its sheer speed and graphical might is such a contrast to the slow-paced cover-shooter that is dominant today. Playing *ZOE 2*, an experience bolstered by imaginative set-pieces that its more rudimentary first instalment completely lacked, illustrates exactly how a sequel should be tackled by the best developers in the business.

ZOE 2 follows the template of how Kojima himself evolves his *Metal Gear* franchise – that each game should feel entirely different from the others. Konami empowers players with an arsenal of overblown sci-fi weaponry, as well as making the game live up to its moniker of 'High Speed Robot Action', one of Kojima's quirky genre titles. There are few arcade experiences that feel this fast, yet it's the gradual unlocking of extra toys that'll have you diving into it again, as well as the promise of the best set-pieces in any PS2 game bearing Kojima's hallowed name.







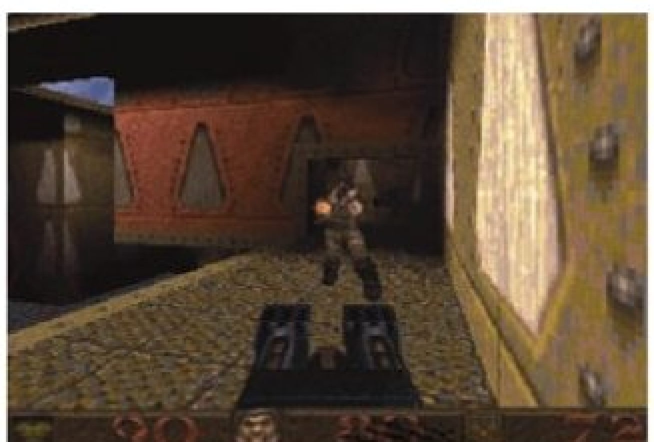












Signature Series

Quake



Quake. It changed a genre forever, and shaped the course of PC gaming into what it is today. John Carmack and John Romero, two of the minds behind this FPS beast, talk to Craig Ritchie about desktop gaming's most influential series

THE BACKGROUND



A relatively small development house in Texas, originally known for its side-scrolling platform series *Commander Keen*, did things very right in the Nineties. id Software, whose staff now fall squarely in the category of gaming legends, smashed what we believed of the limitations of our ugly grey desktop boxes. With each title that they unleashed on the PC gaming public, John Romero, John Carmack, Michael Abrash and the rest of id's talent left both customers and competitors alike dumbfounded.

As we all know by now, it was *Wolfenstein 3D* and *Doom* that led the way as truly groundbreaking titles for id Software, both in terms of their technological achievements and also for simply being fun to play. Gamers were essentially faceless, floating guns fighting vast armies of evil; first Nazis, then the demons of hell.

But it was when *Quake* exploded onto our screens in 1996 that id's offerings presented something so radically new that anyone with more than a passing interest in PC gaming was left asking just how many times one small group of guys could revolutionise first-person shooting.

It didn't matter that it was the same formula as before, with a Lovecraftian twist. It didn't matter that the games' storylines didn't always have much to do with each other, or with anything for that matter – we're looking at you, *Quake III*. The

original *Quake* was always about pure action, taking the winning formulae that had worked so well with *Doom* and *Wolfenstein 3D*, but this time replacing the old ways with the new gods of 'true 3D' and 'realistic physics'. The result was far more than the sum of its parts.

With four main titles, a string of expansions and spin-offs, a massive online community, and its status as a forerunner in the world of professional electronic sports and a major contributor to the speed-run scene, *Quake* broke new ground on all fronts. Genuine 3D graphics, unparalleled online multiplayer, believable physics, and a religious modding and map-making community cemented the series' place in gaming history forever, and paved the way for some of the most important games of all time.

THE GAMES

Quake (1996)



This was the PC gaming world's big one. Like *Final Fantasy VII* to RPGs or *StarCraft* for real-time strategy, *Quake* didn't just join the fray so much as send a shockwave through the global gaming scene. See, what made *Quake*'s arrival so monumental was that it marked the first real 3D shooter. Just that phrase in itself should indicate why *Quake* holds the hallowed spot that it does. Everything that had come before, including *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Doom*, *Heretic*, *Descent* and even the much-loved *Duke Nukem 3D* were actually two-dimensional sprite-based games using skewed textures to give the player the illusion of moving through a 3D world. In reality, everything was still occurring on a flat plane. Even though varying rooms and platforms could have different levels of elevation, players could never actually go under or over anything else, as maps had no real z-axis.

Not so with *Quake*, which sported 360 degrees of potential movement, genuine vertical depth, and characters comprised of three-dimensional polygonal shapes, smoothly rendered by the game in real-time. This graphical innovation may well have slipped into history as merely an impressive technical feat by id Software were the programmers not carrying another ace up their sleeves: physics. *Quake* was the title that gave physics the place it now holds in 3D gaming – not just a novel feature in FPS games, but an integral element in practically every genre, from real-time strategy to racing. Probably the most legendary function of *Quake*'s physics engine, which included a knockback effect for explosions, was the rocket jump. But, as John Romero explains, this was far from an intentional inclusion.

"We absolutely did not anticipate the rocket jump while making *Quake*," he says. "If anyone on the dev team had accidentally rocket jumped at any time, we would have been all over it, and we would have redesigned the levels to make them not so easy to complete with rocket jumping. On E2M1 [Episode 2 Map 1], you can finish the level in 11 seconds with rocket jumping. I would have definitely fixed that. I think it's an awesome ability, and have used it extensively in deathmatch for years. But while we were making *Quake*, no one knew about it."

EXPERT OPINIONS

We pick the brains of John Romero and John Carmack to get an insider's perspective on id Software's revered series

RG: Do you think that *Quake* could have something like the *Street Fighter II HD Remix* treatment and be a hit again?
JR: I absolutely believe *Quake* was a great game in both single-player and multiplayer modes. I designed the game very purposefully to be our darkest, most unsettling, and most violent game. To do that, we had to make a fantasy world with some pretty bizarre creatures, make the world a scary place to explore, and make sure all the feedback, from shooting to getting hit, was violent. For the time, nothing was as dark and unsettling as *Quake*. In fact, even today it's tough to find a game with the same atmosphere and bizarre design. Out of all the source ports, DarkPlaces has been my favourite, and it looks really great with all the settings on high. If a team decided to put the game into a new engine, up-res the models and up-res the audio, it would still be very impactful.

RG: How different is *Quake* to the original game that was envisioned, which had a Thor-like character with a giant hammer, and why did these changes take place?
JC: It became clear fairly early on that closing the distance for melee combat just wasn't as much fun in a first-person perspective as shooting, and we certainly wanted to 'follow the fun'. We were also pretty much flailing without good design leadership through most of the project; many of the elements of the game just emerged from which individual designers were more productive.

RG: What technical difficulties did *Quake* present compared to *Doom*?
JC: The visibility culling problem was one of the harder technical issues, and probably half of *Quake*'s development was spent suffering with missing bits of geometry during gameplay. There are a number of good ways to deal with *Doom*-style levels as a one-dimensional problem, but the arbitrary geometry in *Quake* levels don't lend themselves to any convenient solution. I spent a fair amount of time chasing the chimaera of perfect screen-oriented beam trees before settling on the pre-calculated potentially visible set (PVS) solution that required so much computational horsepower to produce that we were set on the road of almost using supercomputers for game development.

RG: Why such a monotone palette in *Quake*? It seemed such a step back from the more distinct colours of the id games that came before.
JR: The *Quake* palette was picked for two reasons: we wanted the graphics to have 16 levels of darkness per colour, and there were only 256 colours in the VGA palette, which means we could only have 16 different colours. In addition, we wanted the game to be dark and violent, hence the 16 brightness values, and so we chose browns, blues and greys as the dominant colours. It was mostly all about the game's attitude and feeling that helped us choose that palette. It just matched.

RG: Is it true that *Quake III* came about due to the team not speaking to each other and only focusing on single-level arenas?
JC: *Quake III* was designed from the beginning to be a multiplayer-focused game, with bots for single-player. There was a 'deal' internally that the following game would be single-player-focused. That turned out to be *Doom 3*, although we hadn't decided on the game until after *Quake III* shipped.

RG: Where can you see *Quake* heading in the future?
JC: There is a general feeling that after *Quake II*, *Quake 4* and [*Quake Wars*], the Strogg theme is played out, and that it may be worth revisiting the Cthulhu horror theme, but we have no firm plans in place.



» [PC] The original *Quake* merged dark fantasy and gritty sci-fi to create a setting that felt wholly unique.



» [PC] *Quake 4* was the first in the series not to fly the flag for a new engine, instead using the one pioneered in *Doom 3*.

Signature SERIES

> **“Quake sported 360 degrees of movement and three-dimensional polygonal characters, smoothly rendered in real-time”**

Also appeared on…

WHILE THE ORIGINAL *Quake* was ported to pretty much every system out there – including, amazingly enough, the Amiga – and the series has appeared with mixed success on a slew of consoles, one of the most enduring incarnations is the free-to-play *Quake Live*. This browser-based affair, currently running on Windows, OS X and Linux, shows the longevity of the classic *Quake III Arena* gameplay, now 12 years old. *Quake* and *Quake III* are also available on jailbroken iPhones, and while their appearance is a technical marvel, we're not massive fans of the control setup. We definitely have to give a nod to offshoot kwaak3, however, as this open-source port allows for touchscreen, keyboard and trackball input on Android.



From its contributions to the FPS genre – both intentional and inadvertent – and the explosion it caused in the world of online multiplayer, to the community it spawned, *Quake*'s impact on computer and videogaming cannot be overstated.

Quake II (1997)



While its predecessor had a plot that seemed to have been constructed by throwing darts at a board with words like 'nails', 'slipgate' and 'Cthulhu' randomly strewn across it, *Quake II* actually had what can safely be called a storyline, without having to invoke any poetic licence. Here we saw the introduction of the very angry, very violent Strogg, a race of cybernetic aliens who attack Earth. Not groundbreaking stuff, but it did introduce us to Bitterman and gave players a sense of purpose beyond 'kill all that moves'.

On top of this, *Quake II* also saw the brains at id Software making leaps and bounds ahead of the original when it came to actual challenges in the levels. No more were we limited to simply finding colour-coded keys to unlock doors; instead, this time round players were tasked with completing plot-significant goals and solving puzzles that could see them altering the level environments to make it through to the end. Players had to access new areas by, say, flooding locations with water, using giant lasers to blast open new paths, or moving huge pieces of machinery to progress through the maps.

What's more, *Quake II* also introduced the novel concept of revisiting previously completed levels later in the game through the use of a central hub system – not entirely novel in gaming, but it did break away from the strictly linear routes that gamers were used to taking through their first-person shooters.

The game's multiplayer component also saw a major leap forward from id's previous titles, now allowing up to 32 players to take part in its deathmatch frenzies. Thanks to the innovative new tech running under the hood, and its combination of unprecedented graphical standards, outstanding level design and unparalleled online play, *Quake II* went on to be yet another smash hit for id, selling well over a million copies. Two official but third-party expansion packs were released, and thanks to id's propensity for eventually releasing source code into the wilds of its community, the game has seen some outstanding mods and other user-generated content, including a full remake of the original *Doom* in the *Quake II* engine.

Despite *Quake 4* naturally holding the top spot when it comes to technological prowess, it is *Quake II* that remains, for many, the game that offers the pinnacle of the series' single-player experiences.

Quake III Arena (1999)



Quake III Arena is emblematic of where FPS gaming was at the turn of the millennium. In a possibly daring move, but one that turned out entirely justified given PC gaming trends of the late Nineties, id Software released a major mainstream title that didn't possess any single-player campaign whatsoever. It boldly made the move to turn *Quake III* into the online multiplayer game of choice, and it succeeded, thanks to the game's fast, smooth action, an underlying network protocol that functioned better than ever before, the same ease of finding online servers or setting up your own, and the outstanding 'awards' system that has come to be imitated by countless releases since.

Awards were marked by symbols appearing above your character's head, representing such things as your accuracy, your ability to score 100 frags, and an appropriate icon if you'd managed to humiliate another player by killing them with the gauntlet.

We can't cover this without mentioning its expansion, *Quake III: Team Arena*. This was the game of choice for those more into *Quake III*'s team-based modes, and added more game types beyond the standard deathmatch and capture the flag offerings. It included all-new levels and character

UNDER THE INFLUENCE

THE *QUAKE* SERIES broke new ground with each title, contributing to the underlying workings of a slew of the biggest names in the genre today. For a start, two of PC gaming's biggest ever titles have their engine DNA firmly in the *Quake* gene pool: the original *Half-Life* runs on a heavily modified version of the *Quake* engine known as GoldSrc, which later became the basis for Valve's Source engine. And so it is that the likes of *Half-Life 2*, *Portal* and the phenomenon that is *Counter-Strike* also owe their existence to the series. While *Quake II* itself may well be the best game to make use of its underlying tech, it did give rise to the likes of Ion Storm's sci-fi epic *Anachronox* and the controversial *Soldier Of Fortune*. In turn, *Quake III*'s engine ran LucasArts' *Jedi Outcast* and *Jedi Academy*, and went on to power the first release in a little series called *Call Of Duty*. Carmack and crew done good.







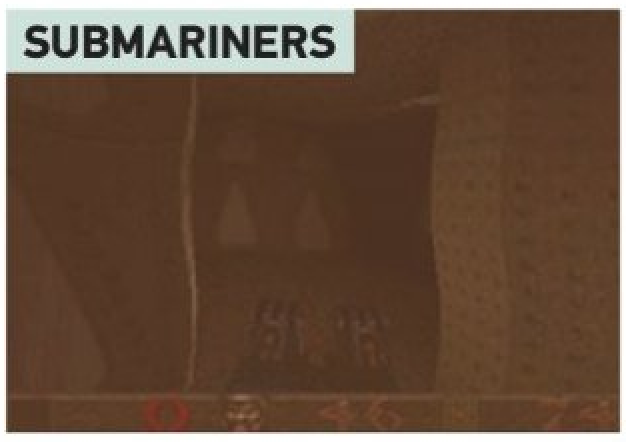
SERIES HIGHLIGHTS

ROCKET JUMPS



■ THIS INADVERTENT INCLUSION to the series made for some interesting moments in *Quake*'s single-player campaign. In multiplayer mode, however, you were nothing without it.

SUBMARINERS



■ THANKS TO EVEN more of its trademark graphical wizardry, id Software introduced proper underwater areas to its games, complete with awesome wobbly screen effects.

LAST BLAST



■ WE LOVED THIS in *Quake II*. After being taken down, some enemies were still able to fire off a few shots at you while on the ground. A simple but awesome innovation.

SINGLE-PLAYER?



■ YEP, THE THIRD *Quake* game tossed aside the idea of a single-player campaign and instead focused itself entirely on how best to allow human beings to simulate killing each other.

BRIGHT COLOURS?



■ *QUAKE III* SAW another serious break from the mould with a bright and colourful palette miles removed from its brown predecessors. Whether you love it or hate it, it worked.

QUAD DAMAGE



■ SO GREAT TO get it; so terrible when you hear it going to someone else. The Quad Damage power-up is a series staple – not to mention a multiplayer holy grail.

FRAGS



■ A DEATHMATCH FUNDAMENTAL, this name for a multiplayer kill has since gone beyond just the *Quake* series and entered into standard gaming parlance.

THAT SOUNDTRACK



■ THE MUSICAL TALENTS of Nine Inch Nails and Sonic Foundry saw the earlier *Quake* titles feature tunes that many fans still include in their iPod playlists to this day.

models, some additional weapons, and was another winner for id.

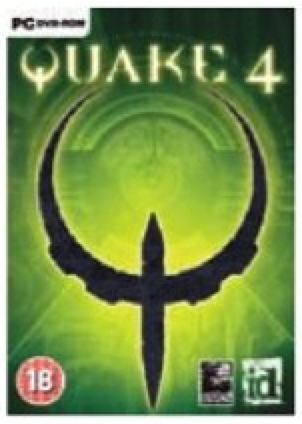
One noteworthy thing to mention about *Quake III*'s technological leap forwards was that, for the first time in the series, and for the first time in many gamers' experiences, the player models were made up of three distinct parts, with head, torso and legs all able to move independently. Thus, players could actually see where opponents were aiming at any point, even if they were running in a different direction, giving important visual clues for high-level play. Additionally, *Quake III* allowed gamers to choose models named Doom, Ranger and Strip, which represent characters from *Doom*, *Quake* and *Quake II* respectively. Admittedly a surface-level 'feature', but a pleasing bit of fan service nonetheless.

More on the tech side was the outstanding bot AI that proved to be id's finest yet, and the best many gamers had ever seen. Players could use a GUI to order their AI-controlled team-mates around, but it was also possible to verbally issue commands and get spoken responses in return. And they weren't sitting ducks when it came to verbal abuse, either: the bots responded very specifically to taunts and trash-talking. More importantly, they would learn and improve their game as they were exposed to your play style and habits. The more one played a particular level, the better the bots would become – in fact, you could see the actual AI pathfinding file growing in size on your hard drive.

Being an id game, there was, of course, a large modding scene surrounding *Quake III*, and one of the most noteworthy releases has to be *Rocket Arena 3*. Sure, *Rocket Arena* had been around since its first iteration was released for the original *Quake* in 1997, but it was *Rocket Arena 3*, making use of all the newfangled engine had to offer, that really stood out. Its amazingly popular Clan Arena mode eventually developed a vast player community, which chose to use this mod first and foremost for their *Quake III* experience.

Quake III is still played by gamers the world over, due in no small part to the free browser-based port, *Quake Live* (see the 'Also appeared on' boxout).

Quake 4 (2005)



In a departure from the *Quake III* formula, *Quake 4*, developed by Raven Software, took players back to the *Quake II* storyline, with the cybernetic Strogg returning as the chief antagonists. The reality, however, is that *Quake 4* had arguably the least impact of all the titles in the series, as it was based on the engine that had already been seen and played in *Doom 3*. Overall, whereas the previous releases in the series marked giant leaps forward for games, impressing with their innovation, *Quake 4* was, unfortunately, just one small step. Due to its level design and standard sci-fi setting, it's easy to see how it could just as easily have been named *Doom 4*.

"You see," says John Romero, "id had three big franchises at that time: *Wolfenstein*, *Doom* and *Quake*. Each one was different. But with *Quake II*, they crossed the line into *Doom*'s territory by having biomechanical enemies, and making the player more of a big, badass space marine. With *Doom 3*, they made the game very dark like *Quake*, so I think they started to muddy both IPs. When *Quake 4* was released, I was playing it and at some point I said: 'I don't even know if I'm playing a *Quake* or *Doom* game.' I've heard that id is pondering going back to the original fantasy-themed design, and I agree it's a much better direction for the series."



» [PC] If you thought *Quake* was impressive, look how far id came in only a year.

THE CLASSIC GAME



Konami's shoot-'em-up *Gradius* became an incredibly successful franchise for the Japanese developer, going on to spawn numerous sequels over the years and remaining a firm favourite with shoot-'em-up fans everywhere. By far one of its best legacies, however, is the delightfully nutty little spin-off franchise *Parodius,* which first made its appearance on the underrated MSX. Utilising the core values and gameplay mechanics of Konami's original 1985 arcade hit, it sugar-coats the familiar setting with insanely chirpy tunes, a new selection of ships (including an oh-so-cute Vic Viper) and some of the craziest videogame adversaries to ever get pixelated. In short, it's as magnificent as it is insane.

TWINBEE

TwinBee was already a fairly established Konami character thanks to his appearance in the *TwinBee* arcade game that had been released in 1985. The anthropomorphic spacecraft with a penchant for punching enemies with his fists perfectly suits the crazy atmosphere and boasts a nice range of power-ups.

OCTOPUS

This cute little octopus wasn't based on a previous Konami character, having been created exclusively for the franchise. Rumours, however, point to his inspiration coming from the huge cartoon octopuses that would be found outside Japanese restaurants. All we know is that the little fella is adorable.

PENTAROU

Pentarou is the son of Penta, who appeared in Konami's *Antarctic Adventure* in 1983. Massively popular in the Eighties (he was often used with his father as Konami's mascot) the absurdity of a flying penguin makes him a perfect fit for Konami's nutty franchise.

VIC VIPER

First making his appearance in *Gradius,* this is a new, slightly podgier but much cuter version of the iconic arcade spacecraft. Despite his newfound cuteness, Vic Viper still packs a formidable punch, having all the power-up strengths and weaknesses of his alternate *Gradius* version. You certainly don't want to mess with him.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

WHY IT'S A CLASSIC



It's a crazy cocktail

Parodius (or *Parodius Da!* as it is also known in Japan) is a classic game because it not only manages to build on its 8-bit predecessor, but also respects its source material. Everything about *Parodius* is mental, from its fast-paced renditions of classical music to its tongue-in-cheek references to past *Gradius* enemies, bosses and levels. And yet, beneath the gaudy visuals, kooky bosses and nutty enemies lies a shoot-'em-up that's just as good, if not better, than the game it mocks. The juxtaposition between hardcore shooter and fluffy adversaries makes for an enticing cocktail that still manages to impress.

BEST PARODY



The Showgirl

While the MSX original was wonderful, the improved visuals that Konami's new TMNT2 board offered made its insane world come to life. Lampooning is great when it's done well, and Konami has always been on fire with its *Parodius* series. Many of the bosses from *Gradius* games can be found throughout the series (the American Eagle in level 2 is a dead ringer for the Pheonix found in *Gradius II*, while the Vegas showgirl (our favourite) features the same attack patterns as *Gradius 2*'s mechanical spider. And yet, for all its silly lampooning, the core mechanics of *Gradius* remain as good as ever.

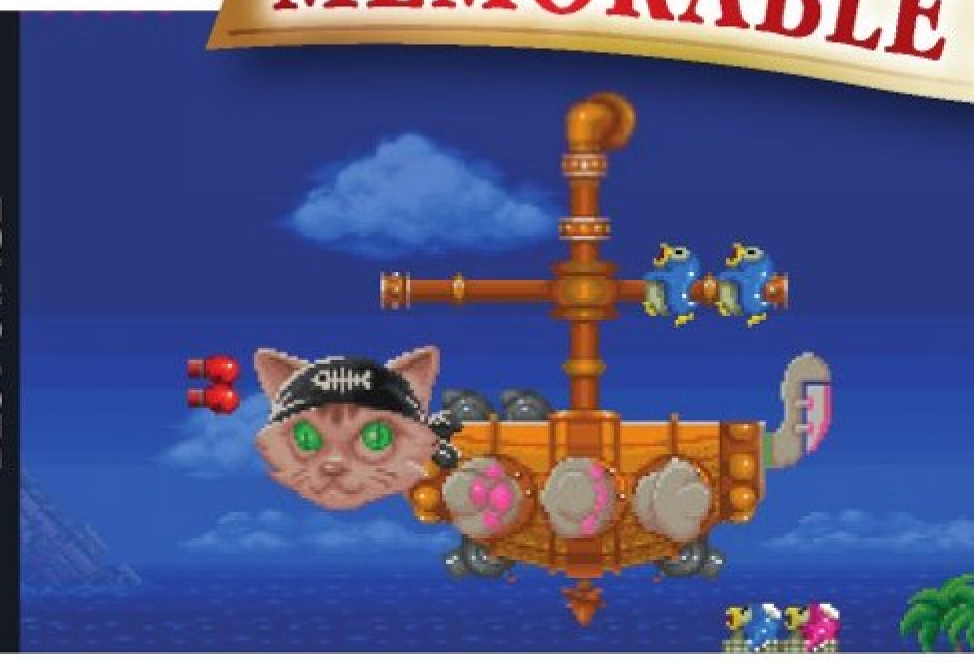
BEST CONVERSION



SNES for the Win!

If we're honest, all the console conversions of *Parodius* are of an incredibly high standard. The NES and Game Boy outings in particular are very good when you consider the limitations of the hardware, while the PC Engine and Sharp X68000 ports are also beautifully reproduced. If we were forced into a corner, we'd probably settle for the excellent SNES conversion. Konami was at the top of its game during the 16-bit era, and worked some amazing magic on Nintendo's 16-bit console. In addition to featuring all the levels and music of the arcade game, Konami also managed to squeeze in an additional level.

BEST STAGE



Start as you mean to go on

There are plenty of superb stages in *Parodius*, but we'll confess to loving the first stage of Konami's blaster the most. It's brilliantly paced, and sets the standard for the craziness to come. Everything starts off innocently, with the typical black space of *Gradius*. Then the blackness fades away, replaced by gaudy greens and sparkling blues. Penguins attack en masse, plump killer whales leap through the waters, and oversized generators spit out swarms of bees. It gets crazier with a mid-level boss that takes the form of a pirate cat/balloon, and a final encounter against an oversized pirate penguin.

BEST BOSS



Our type of boss

While many of *Parodius*'s bosses look barmy, they're all incredibly tough to take down. One of the most challenging, and also one of the best in the game, is the mid-level boss found on stage 5. Not only is he a direct parody of the huge mothership found on stage 3 of Irem's revered shoot-'em-up, but he's also just as tough, requiring a huge amount of skill to bypass. He's immediately followed up by a huge female Easter Island head, which constantly assaults you with additional heads that it spits out of its mouth. It's a relatively short stage, to be sure, but it's easily one of the toughest in the game.

BEST POWER-UP



For whom the bells toll

All four characters of *Parodius* have plenty of power-ups at their disposal, ranging from ripple lasers to bombs and the ability to shoot backwards. Our favourite power-ups are the bells scattered throughout each stage. First featured in Konami's *TwinBee* series, they come in different colours, each associated with a specific power-up. One causes your ship to expand to four times its size, while others grant you bonus points or a smart bomb. The funniest is the white bell, which bestows your character with a megaphone that shouts out all sorts of silly nonsense, destroying anything it its path.



IN THE KNOW

- » **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

What the press said… ages ago



Mean Machines, 93%
Imagine our joy when SNES *Parodius* arrived and was in fact the best version of the game ever. If only everyone put this much work into their games.

What we think

Thanks to its tireless energy and the wealth of clever videogame references it contains, we still love *Parodius* today as much as we did the first time we played it. It's a huge improvement over its MSX predecessor, which was a great game to begin with, and it remains a highly entertaining and challenging shoot-'em-up that just doesn't seem to age.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Atari Inc Part 1

Formed by two engineers, Atari rose to define the early games industry. However, its rapid expansion hid the looming threat of bankruptcy that defined its early days, right through to the corporate overindulgence and personality clashes that oversaw its ultimate downfall

Atari's origins go back to Ampex and a little-remembered division called Videofile. A document storage and retrieval system that used videotape and television displays to search for and reproduce documents, it was capable of recalling a full page out of the phone book and printing it accurately. An analogue engineer by the name of Ted Dabney had been working in the 'Input/Output' group at Videofile, responsible for the cameras and printers used to record and later print out documents, when he found himself with a new office mate. Just out of college, the young Nolan Bushnell had moved out to California from Utah after getting an entry-level job at Ampex.

Skill and personality-wise the two couldn't have been more different. According to their boss, Ed DeBenedeti: "Nolan was the dreamer and Ted was the plodder. Ted's engineering work and ideas were conservative perhaps in the extreme. Nolan and later interns Al [Alcorn] and Steve [Bristow] were brilliant, inexperienced enough that they had no idea of what one could not do."

In a sense, Ted's experienced approach to engineering would serve well to give Nolan's inexperience and forward-looking manner a solid foundation as the two embarked on a side project together. Already enjoying daily games of Go in the office on Ted's custom-built board, Nolan talked about wanting to pursue bringing computer games to the arcade environment. Tapping the more experienced Ted, he began partnering with him on trying to make the dream a reality. According to Ted: "He took me off to Stanford to see [*Spacewar!*] so I could help him come up with ways to do such a thing."

The original plan was to bring the experience direct to the arcade via a PDP or comparable minicomputer, and a third partner with programming experience, Larry Bryan, was brought in to that end. It turned out to be a short partnership, however, when this approach was quickly found to be cost prohibitive, but they did get a name for their engineering group out of it – Syzygy Engineering. If this plan for an electronic arcade game worked out, the two planned to have Syzygy be a contract-engineering firm for the arcade industry.

When it was decided to move to a non-general purpose format – or 'state machine', where the game is comprised of zero code but rather hardwired through chip logic – it became Ted's turn to do the heavy lifting. He designed all the circuitry to put a spot on a modified television screen and move it around, and Nolan shopped it around for someone who may be interested in funding the development of a final product, as well as manufacturing and distribution. Finding closed doors everywhere he looked, and little interest in the arcade industry mecca of Chicago, he finally found a coin-op company locally that was interested. Nutting Associates had previous successes with electro-mechanical games such as

INSTANT EXPERT

Atari Inc was founded on 28 June 1972 but technically began in 1969 as a partnership between Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney called Syzygy Engineering.

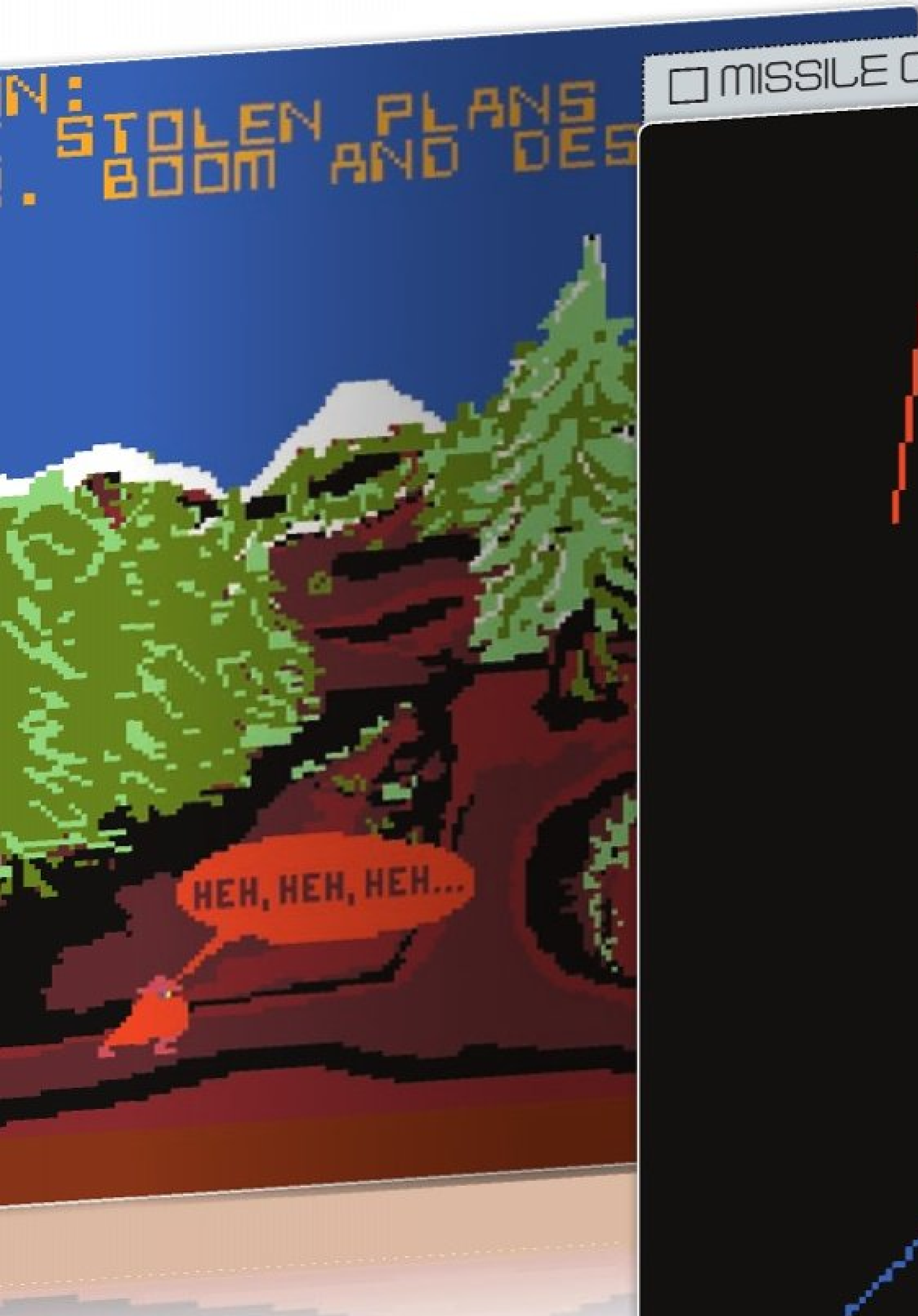
Atari's first arcade game was *Pong* in 1972. Its first consumer product was a home version of *Pong* for Sears in 1975.

The Video Computer System (VCS), better known as the Atari 2600, began its life in August of 1975 and was released on 14 October 1977.

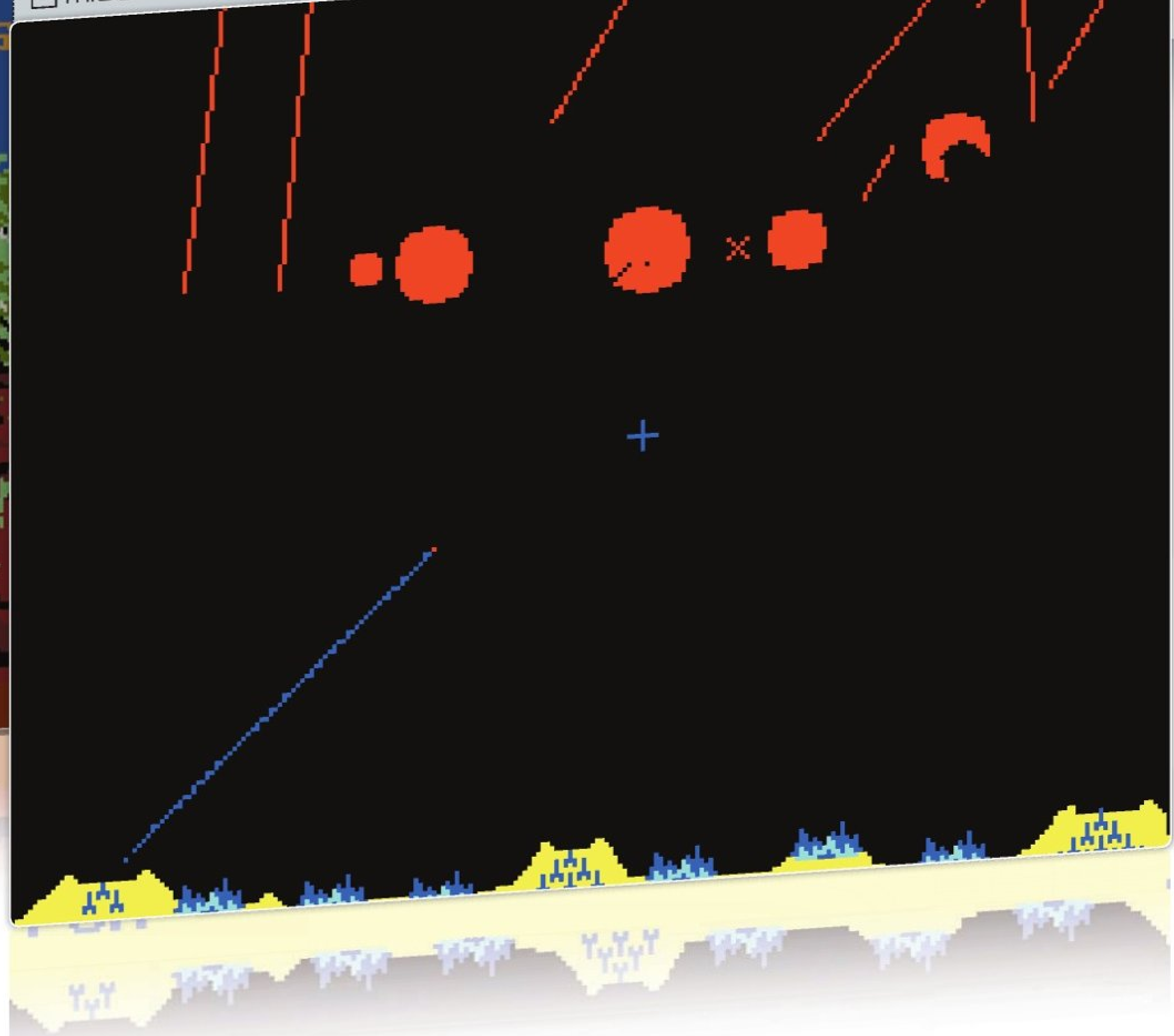
Warner Communications bought Atari in 1976 for an estimated $32 million. It gave away half of it in 1984 for no money – just promissory stock.

Atari's top game properties are *Pong, Breakout, Asteroids, Centipede, Battlezone, Missile Command* and *Tempest*.

Atari affected the popular culture of the early Eighties to such a degree that it became synonymous with high technology. It even affected US politics, as the term 'Atari Democrat' was created to describe Democrats who supported the development of high-tech industries to stimulate the US economy of the time.

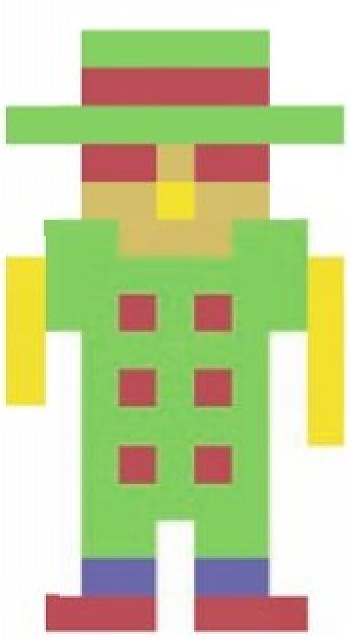


MISSILE COMMAND



“He definitely had no ideas about TV games of any sort”

TED DABNEY ON NOLAN'S VISION WHEN THEY STARTED WORKING TOGETHER



Computer Quiz and saw the potential of this new format. Hiring Nolan as lead engineer to finish adapting Ted's work into a game while performing other duties at the company, Nutting became the future of the industry for a short time.

Having talked Ted into leaving Ampex and joining him at Nutting, by the end of development Nolan was itching to have more input on the business side of things. The two left Nutting by the spring of 1972 and decided to make Syzygy Engineering their main source of income. Funding the startup with money from Nutting's purchase of *Computer Space*, and subsidising daily operations with a coin route, Nolan looked to get their first contract. Their first client was Bally, which contracted them to produce pinball playfields and, more importantly, an electronic driving game. Nolan hired former Ampex intern Al Alcorn to work on the proposed game, and allowed him to get acclimated to their video circuitry from *Computer Space*. Nolan had seen a demonstration of the first videogame console, the Magnavox Odyssey, that past May, and decided to have Al do an arcade version of its tennis game. By the time Al was done in August of 1972, Nolan was outvoted two to one to make Al's warm-up game, *Pong*, Syzygy's actual game for Bally.

It was during this time that Atari got its now-legendary name. When looking to formally incorporate Syzygy Engineering, it was found that several other companies were already using the name. Giving the clerk a list of names based on moves from Go, the clerk picked Atari, not knowing that he would be choosing the name of the company that would define electronic entertainment for years to come. On 27 June 1972, Atari Inc was officially born. Nolan and Ted decided to keep the Syzygy name for the engineering portion of their venture, and use Atari for their outward-facing business activities.

A surprise hit

After putting several test cabinets of *Pong* out into the wild – most notably one at Andy Capp's Tavern that sat right next to a *Computer Space* unit – a funny thing happened. *Pong* was a big success, drawing in far more money than the *Computer Space* machines were, to the extent that the Atari staff were afraid that when they reported back to Bally on how the test run was doing, Bally wouldn't believe them. Wary of this, they under-reported the earnings numbers, and Bally still thought they were exaggerating.

With Bally stalling on accepting the game and looking to possibly pass it off to its subsidiary, Midway Manufacturing, and Atari knowing how well the game was actually doing, Nolan, Ted and Al had a decision to make: either let *Pong* sit in limbo to maybe be rejected altogether, or look to go into manufacturing for themselves. They chose the latter, and Ted concocted a plan that

BY THE NUMBERS

$40 million The amount of profit generated by Atari as its golden age began in 1977, the year it released the hugely successful Atari 2600.

$539 million The amount it lost in 1983, as the industry's crash was under way.

2 The number of competitors Atari had in video arcade games in 1972.

25 The number of competitors by 1974.

$98.95 The cost of Atari's first home console, *Pong*, in 1975.

$189 The cost of the Atari 2600 at launch.

1 The number of manufacturers making games for the Atari 2600 at its 1977 release. Of course, it was just Atari itself, although third-parties would quickly appear.

145 The number of manufacturers making games for the 2600 worldwide at the time of the crash.

5,000 The number of shares allegedly sold by Ray Kassar based on insider knowledge of Atari's performance.

FROM THE ARCHIVES



TIMELINE

- **1969** SYZYGY PARTNERSHIP FORMED
- **1971** *COMPUTER SPACE* RELEASED BY NUTTING ASSOCIATES
- **1972** ATARI INC FORMED. BOARD OF DIRECTORS ARE NOLAN K BUSHNELL, S FRED DABNEY (TED DABNEY), AND THEIR WIVES PAULA N BUSHNELL AND JOAN M DABNEY
- **1972** THE FIRST TEN PRODUCTION *PONG* UNITS SHIP
- **1973** TED DABNEY FORCED TO QUIT, BUT REMAINS ON THE BOARD. ATARI BEGINS RELATIONSHIP WITH CYAN ENGINEERING
- **1973** KEE GAMES IS FORMED AS A 'COMPETITOR', WHILE HAVING SEPARATE MANAGEMENT AND ENGINEERS, THEY SHARE THE SAME ASSEMBLY LINE
- **1974** *GRAN TRAK 10* RELEASED. LAYOFFS ENSUE



Nolan send a carefully crafted letter to Bally, suggesting that it officially reject *Pong* so that Atari could develop a new game for it. The letter worked, and Atari became a full design and manufacturing arcade company.

New horizons

From there the growth was explosive, with Nolan and Ted hiring people off the streets to fill the manufacturing needs, and Nolan hiring more engineers and management to help with the growth. Tension began to develop between Nolan and Ted on how the company should be running, however, and Nolan decided that there wasn't room for two heads – a fact that became obvious to Ted when Nolan hired someone to come in and help restructure the business and employee roles. When they asked Ted what he did at Atari, he knew his time was up; he was forced out of the company, with management firmly in Nolan's hands, as Atari began its 'Innovative Leisure' period,

By continuing to pump out new games based on sports themes while doing engineering research for an eventual move into the consumer market, Nolan looked to stay ahead of the game. As Al Alcorn relates: "Nolan didn't want to define us as the best coin-op game designer and manufacturer; instead he focused broadly on the entertainment business. We were creating new, disruptive products in the leisure industry. Nolan figured people would spend more money on what they want, not what they need." But things soon took their toll on the fledgling company.

Nolan had made some bad hiring decisions for the financial management portion of the company, and it soon needed to lay off employees. To make matters worse, it started facing intense competition from others entering the videogame market, including old industry hands like Bally and Chicago Coin, and new companies like Allied Leisure. Already competing for a spot at the well-established coin-op distribution table, Nolan came up with the idea to create a 'competitor' to increase the cash flow of the company. It would have its own building, exhibit on its own at the industry shows, and have its own purchasing, sales and engineering group, which would include another former Ampex intern, Steve Bristow, but all its manufacturing would be done on the Atari assembly line. This company, Kee Games, could clone Atari titles, allowing the company to sell them 'exclusively' to two distributors at once.

The wheels come off

Financial disaster struck in the form of *Gran Trak 10*. The game was so badly engineered that they started coming back to Atari in droves, forcing Al Alcorn to come out of his sabbatical and redesign them, and forcing an even more lengthy delay to this already costly game. Then, on top of that, an accounting error set the selling price of each unit to $995, when it cost $1,095 to manufacture it in the first place. It resulted in pushing Atari even further towards bankruptcy, and the company ended up losing half a million dollars between 1973 and 1974. By the end of 1974, Atari began to fully merge Kee into its parent and offloaded its Japanese operation to Nakamura Manufacturing Co, better known as Namco.

Things started looking a bit better in 1975 as Kee's management entrenched itself at Atari. Kee president and Nolan's next door neighbour Joe Keenan became president of Atari; Gill Williams became VP of manufacturing, helping to smooth out issues there; and Kee's lead engineer, Steve Bristow, became VP of engineering. Along with Steve came top engineering talent and future stars like Lyle Rains, who, together with Steve, had created the blockbuster *Tank* at Kee. Several arcade classics would be released in 1975 that would go on to become more known for their Atari 2600 versions but served the ultimate goal of helping Atari get back on track: *Anti-Aircraft*, *Jet Fighter*, and the multiplayer *Indy 800*. The biggest development, though, was the fulfilment

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Nolan Bushnell
After leaving Atari, Nolan headed his Chuck E Cheese Pizza Time Theatre until facing bankruptcy. Funding several start-ups under Catalyst Technologies in the Eighties and briefly returning to video arcade games under Sente, he ran a string of entertainment companies including PlayNet and uWink, which eventually closed due to poor market performance. He is currently partnered in Anti-Aging Games and is an advisor to the current owner of the Atari brand, Atari SA (formerly Infogrames).



Ted Dabney
After leaving Atari Inc in 1973, Ted worked for arcade company Meadows for a time as well as several other non-arcade engineering jobs. He even briefly worked for his ex-partner again when he created the pizza number callout system for the early Chuck E Cheese, as well as the Chuck E Cheese-branded *Isaac Asimov Presents Super Quiz* arcade game in the late Seventies. He's currently enjoying retirement while reacting to the recent interest in his involvement in early videogame history with surprise, wonder and gracious interviews.



Al Alcorn
After leaving Atari Inc in 1983, he became an Apple Fellow in 1986 before moving through a string of engineering management positions at various entertainment companies in the Nineties and early 2000s. He's currently VP of engineering at uGetit, a mobile social gaming firm that combines gaming with 'social shopping'. Former Atari employee Roger Hector also joins him there.



Steve Bristow
Since leaving Atari in 1984 after more than a decade, Steve has worked as an engineer at various communications firms. He's currently employed at headset manufacturer Plantronics.

1974 – KEE GAMES RELEASES THE BLOCKBUSTER *TANK*

1975 – ATARI'S FIRST HOME CONSOLE, THE SEARS TELE-GAMES-BRANDED HOME *PONG*, IS RELEASED. ATARI SETS UP A PINBALL DIVISION

1976 – ATARI IS BOUGHT BY WARNER COMMUNICATIONS FOR ABOUT $28 MILLION, IN ADDITION TO THE FUNDING OF NOLAN'S VIDEOGAME/PIZZA PARLOUR IDEA, WHICH BECAME CHUCK E CHEESE. THE ARCADE GAME *NIGHT DRIVER* IS RELEASED

1977 – THE VIDEO COMPUTER SYSTEM (ATARI 2600) IS RELEASED

1978 – NOLAN BUSHNELL FORCED TO QUIT ATARI. TAKES CHUCK E CHEESE WITH HIM AND IS REPLACED BY RAY KASSAR

1979 – ATARI INTRODUCES ITS FIRST COMPUTERS, THE 400 AND 800, WHICH SHIP IN NOVEMBER AT THE SAME TIME *ASTEROIDS* IS RELEASED IN ARCADES. ATARI BEGINS ASKING RETAILERS TO BEGIN SELLING HOME VIDEOGAMES ALL YEAR ROUND

1980 – *SPACE INVADERS* IS RELEASED FOR THE 2600, THE SYSTEM'S FIRST MUST-HAVE GAME. LATER THAT YEAR ATARI RELEASES *MISSILE COMMAND* AND *BATTLEZONE* IN THE ARCADES

1982 – ATARI RELEASES THE ATARI 5200 AS WELL AS THE MUCH-MALIGNED *PAC-MAN* AND *E.T.* FOR THE 2600. ATARI HITS RECORD SALES OF $2 BILLION, BUT ALSO BEGINS ITS DECLINE

1983 – RAY KASSAR RESIGNS, AND IS REPLACED BY JIM MORGAN IN SEPTEMBER

1984 – ATARI INC IS SPLIT UP BY WARNER COMMUNICATIONS. ATARI'S CONSUMER DIVISION GOES TO JACK TRAMIEL, WHICH HE ROLLS INTO TRAMIEL TECHNOLOGY LTD AND RENAMES ATARI CORPORATION. WARNER MAINTAINS THE ARCADE DIVISION AND RENAMES IT ATARI GAMES CORPORATION

of Nolan's wish for Atari to enter the consumer arena.

Homecoming

Al Alcorn and several engineers had been working on bringing *Pong* to homes. The move to the consumer market meant shrinking the large logic-based arcade board to a small integrated circuit, for which a partnership with chip manufacturer Synertek and its IC designer Jay Miner was formed. The end result was a product that put Atari on the map in the consumer market when it released through Sears in time for Christmas 1975. The research and development firm Cyan was also busy during *Pong*'s home release, working on a microprocessor-based home console that had the potential to more than make up for the *Gran Trak 10* fiasco.

Still realising that it wasn't enough to completely save the company and expand operations like he wanted to, Nolan began looking for more investors in Atari, and eventually, an actual buyer. As 1976 began, the buyer appeared in the form of Warner Communications. Warner had been on a buying spree to expand its operations, and the acquisition of an expanding videogame firm like Atari fit nicely into its plans. The deal was signed in October 1976, officially making Atari a Warner subsidiary.

Under Warner, development of Atari's consumer line began to blossom, the most prolific aspect of which was Cyan's microprocessor-based game console. First codenamed Stella and then officially named the Video Computer System (CX-2600), it was released in 1977 and proved to be the path to true greatness for the company when it became an icon of the videogame industry in the early Eighties. It sold well that first season in 1977 but proved financially harmful to Atari the following year when manufacturing delays caused a shortage of the console for the 1978 Christmas season. As in the arcade industry years before, Atari was soon joined by competitors eating up the new console market – Bally with its Professional Arcade, Magnavox and Philips with the Odyssey², RCA with the Studio II, and programmable console pioneer Fairchild with its Channel F a year before Atari's console. Atari needed to separate the VCS from the pack.

Also contributing to Atari's familiar financial problems for 1978 were a lacklustre arcade line-up, such as *Sky Raider*, *Ultra Tank* and *Smokey Joe*. To make matters worse, there was tension between Nolan and Warner Communications. Nolan had been accused of being a lax CEO since the purchase, almost "checking out" of the much-needed daily running of the company, and by his own admission that was the case. Consequently, it left more room for Warner and its installed executives to flex their muscles, such as Raymond Kassar, the head of the consumer division. It didn't help matters that Nolan began butting heads with Warner on issues like the future of the pinball division, or even the future of the VCS.

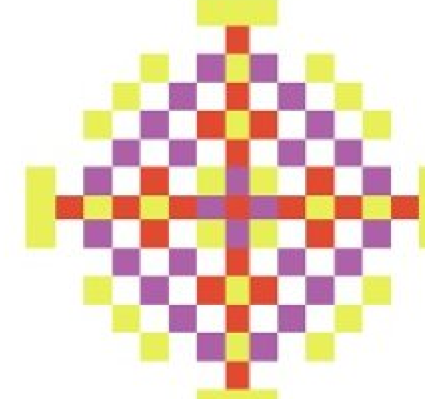
By the autumn of 1978, Nolan had crossed the line by trying to hold meetings in secret without Warner staff. Warner put Nolan out to pasture after a reorganisation plan and, like Ted years before, he was left with no recourse but to quit that December. Ray Kassar was now left in ▶



» Nolan Bushnell inspecting rows of *Pong* units ready to ship out in 1973.

"It was just business, nothing personal"

NOLAN BUSHNELL ON FORCING OUT ATARI CO-FOUNDER TED DABNEY

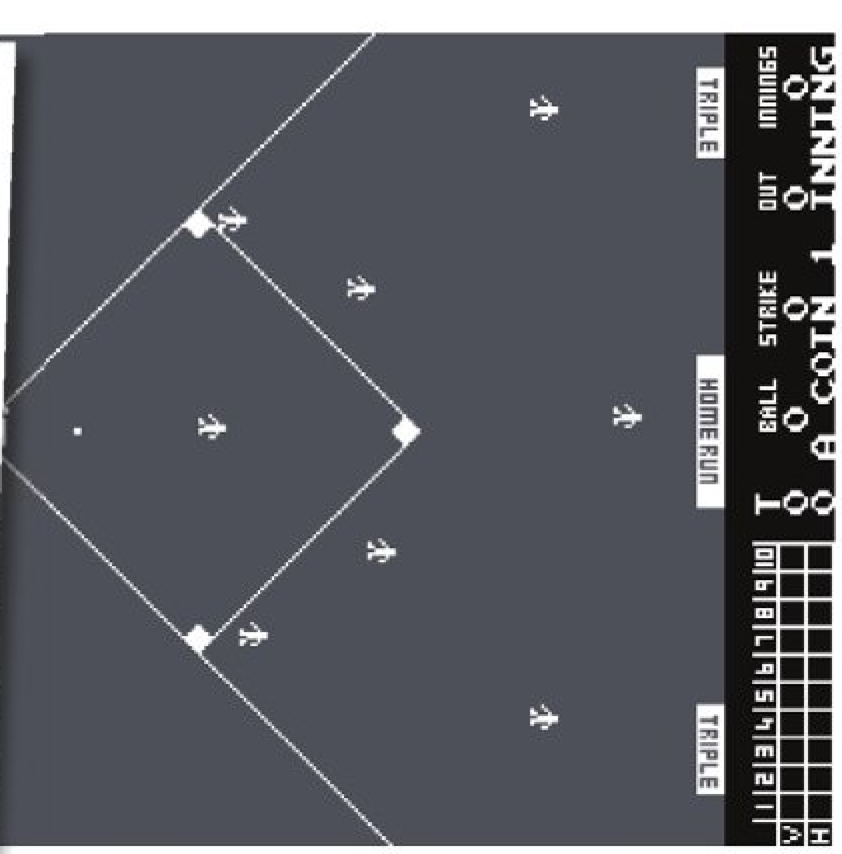


HOLOGAMES

As the electronic toys craze hit in the late Seventies and early Eighties, Atari had a brief foray into its own handheld electronic devices and board games under its new electronic games division. Starting in 1978, Atari released *Touch Me*, a handheld game based on its own arcade game of the same name, which competed with and lost against a game from Milton Bradley inspired by *Touch Me*, *Simon*. Atari planned to follow up with handheld games based on arcade properties like *Breakout* and the licensed *Space Invaders*, and even planned advanced tabletop hologram-based products like the Atari Cosmos and Atari Spector. Alas, it was never to be. By the early Eighties, the electronic games market was lagging in the US and Atari shut down the division. Atari not only lost some advanced games in the process, but it lost the company's third employee, Al Alcorn, who had been heading the Cosmos project and quit shortly after.

» Enjoying a round of *Battlezone* during its development are: (left to right) Lyle Rains, Dona Bailey, Ed Rotberg, Jeff Boscole and Owen Rubin (seated).





FROM THE ARCHIVES



» Two shirts designed by Dan Kramer for internal use at Atari to celebrate the release of his Atari 5200 Trak-Ball.

SIX OF THE BEST



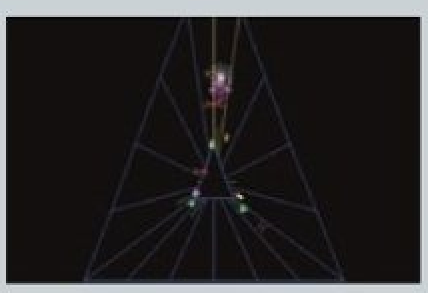
Asteroids [1979]
The classic space shooter that influenced a generation, and it's still fun to play. While most will have to settle for playing this game on pixelated technology, nothing compares to playing in its original crisp vector monitor format.



Centipede [1980]
Another innovative game, *Centipede* improves on the bug theme initiated by *Galaxian*. Set in a dynamically changing garden playfield and complete with vibrant colour scheme, this top-down shooter proved a smash hit for Atari.



Warlords [1980]
Still one of the best multiplayer video arcade games of all time, its home port for the 2600 was just as fun and one of the only times you'll hook up four paddles. The arcade version includes a breathtaking 3D cut-out reflected backfield.



Tempest [1980]
Atari's first colour vector game, this fast-paced shooter that has you rotating around geometric shapes is again one that just looks best on a vector monitor. A capable home version wasn't released until *Tempest 2000* for the Jaguar.



Missile Command [1980]
Global thermonuclear war, Atari style. The home ports dumbed down the gameplay for use with a single joystick and button. Accordingly, Atari engineer Dan Kramer was inspired to design a home version of the arcade trackball.

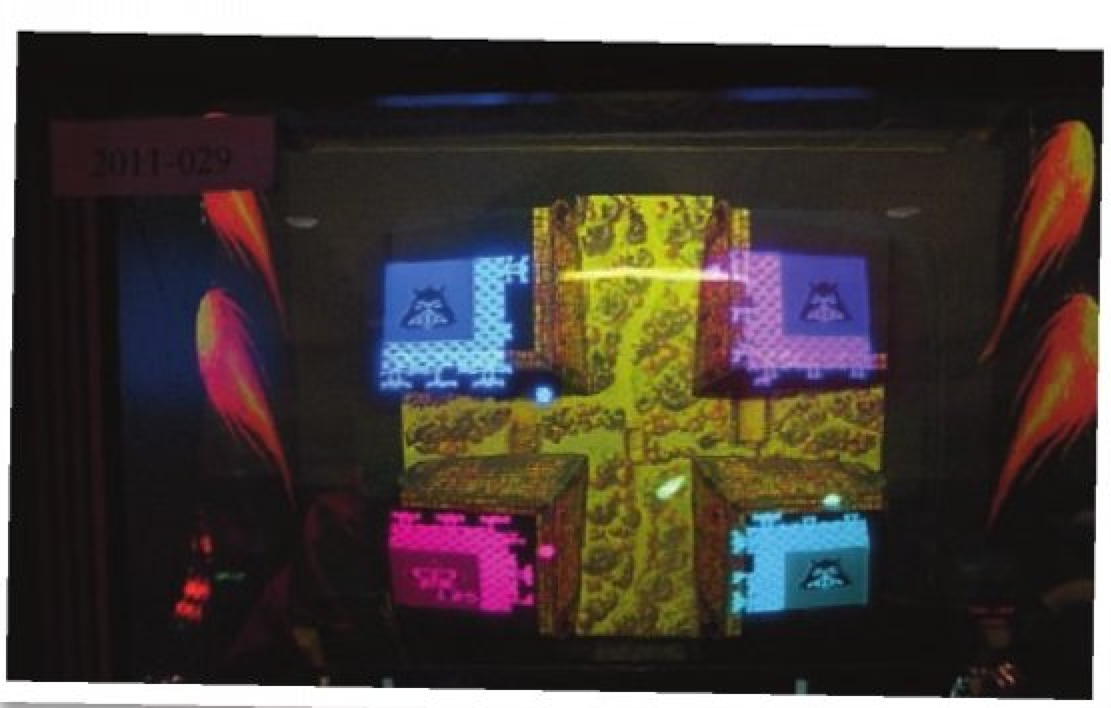


Tank [1974]
A classic that many will never have a chance to play, as it's a discrete logic game that therefore cannot be emulated. It's satisfying using dual sticks to manoeuvre your tanks through a maze while you attempt to blast your opponent.

ONE TO AVOID



Slot Racers (2600) [1978]
This, Warren Robinett's warm-up game for the much more successful *Adventure*, is Atari on autopilot. While an original concept, it was done better in later coin-ops like *Spectar* and *Targ*. 2600 games are not known for their inspired graphics, but the cars don't even look like cars.



charge and began heading what many consider the golden age of the company, if not the entire Atari brand. Not without a little speed bump to start out with, though.

Under new management

Shortly after coming to the company, Ray had begun bumping heads with some of the Video Computer System programmers, calling them "high-strung prima donnas" in an off-the-record portion of an interview with the *San Jose Mercury News* that ended up getting published. A meeting designed to be a pep talk in early 1979 proved to be the last straw for some, as he managed to alienate even more.

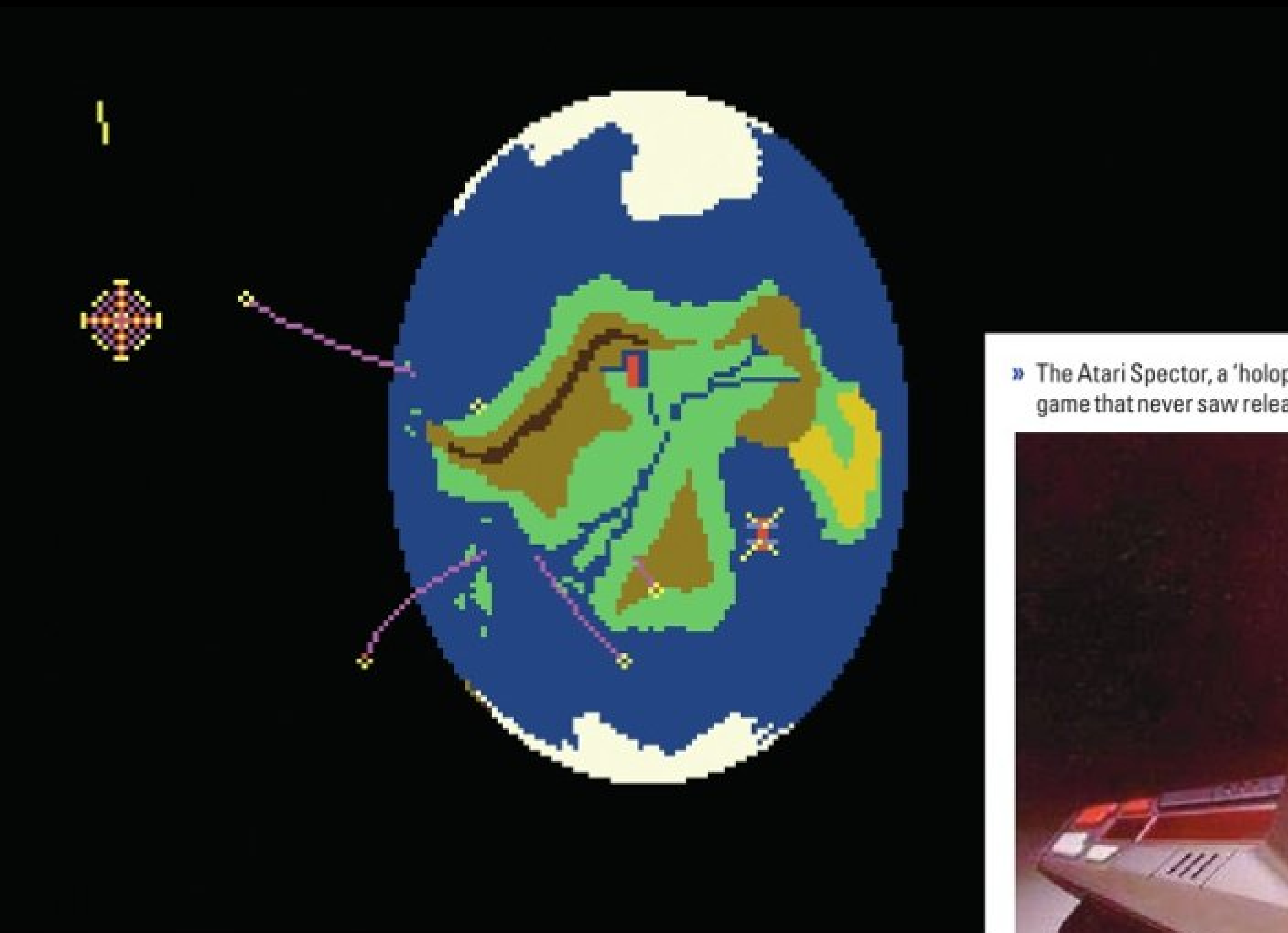
VCS and Atari 400/800 engineer Joe Decuir related: "Ray called a meeting of the entire engineering team, coin-op and consumer – a bit of 'blah blah', and then he started talking about what we were going to do. He was excited about the [400 and 800] computer. He said we were going to sell them in designer colours so that women would buy them, and that we would also have home decorating software. A number of women I knew in engineering decided to resign because of this. One of the VCS programmers asked him how he was going to deal with the creative talent – the game designers. He said he knew about creative types from dealing with towel designers at Burlington Mills, his previous company. A core of programmers were disgusted, and formed Activision."

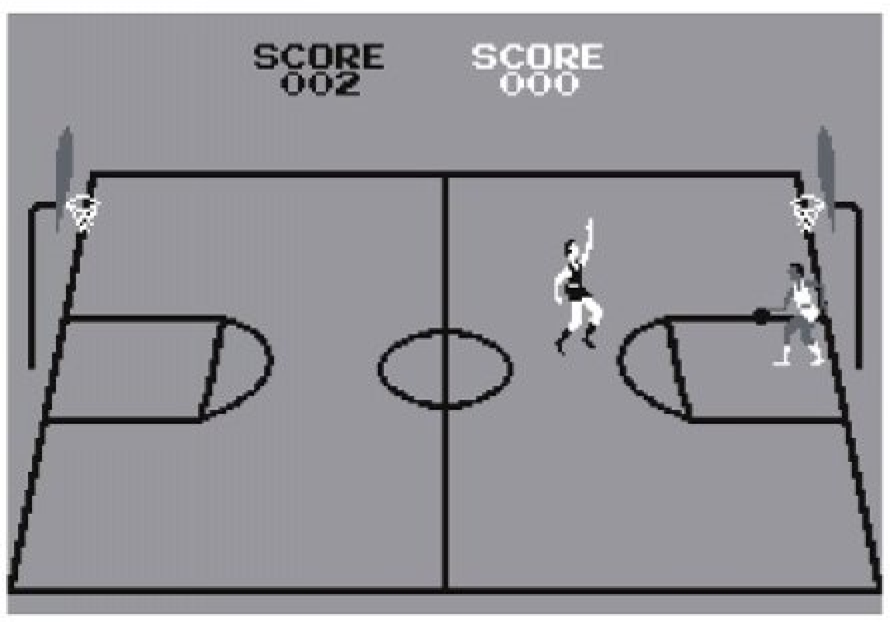
Fortunately, much of the coin-op talent stayed on to thrust Atari to the front just as the market began exploding thanks to Taito's *Space Invaders*. A string of now-iconic hits were released from 1979 onwards, including *Asteroids*, *Battlezone*, *Centipede* and more. The consumer division and its Video Computer System rode the wave in 1980 after a timely licensing of *Space Invaders* for the console came to fruition. Giving the lagging console its killer app, it was soon joined by an expanding third-party market thanks to Activision, and sales really took off.

The catalyst for Atari's golden age was Warner Communications itself. As a powerhouse media company, it began leveraging its wide net of subsidiaries to add to Atari's public presence in the videogame craze of the early Eighties that it dominated. What many now take for granted or attribute to Nintendo during its Famicom/NES heyday was actually pioneered by Warner during this period. Atari-themed magazines, movie placements, toys, clothing, party favours, costumes, jewellery, storybooks, big budget cinematic commercials, collectables and more built the brand into a commercial juggernaut.

By 1982, Atari had become Warner Communications' golden goose. Comprising 80 per cent of the videogame industry, Atari was doing slightly over $2 billion in sales and producing more than half of Warner's $4 billion in revenues, and over 65 per cen of its profits. Warner saw only continued growth, and did what it could to force what should have been considered unmanageable growth, if not a bubble waiting to burst. This included frequent second-guessing of Atari management, creating a dual management. Money-losing deals such as the now-legendary *E.T.* tie-in were forced on Atari, and a string of ongoing projects that would have put the company far ahead in both consoles and computers were cancelled in favour of more incremental advancements like the Atari 5200 console and the XL series of computers. Not that some of Atari's management, such as Ray Kassar, weren't enjoying their perks; Learjets, limousines, yachts and luxury office remodelling were all on the menu.

The signs of the end for the company were beginning as it enjoyed its record profits that year. By August of 1982, warehouses around the US began piling up with unsold inventory thanks to the glut of competing consoles on the market. As Gordon Crawford, a representative of the investment group that brokered the original sale of Atari to Warner related: "At the January '82 Consumer Electronics Show there were three or four new video hardware systems and about 50 new software systems – all the warning lights went on for me. Then, at the June CES, it was worse! There were about 200 software systems. This was a business where the year before it had been







» The Atari Spector, a 'holoptic' tabletop game that never saw release.



essentially a monopoly, and now there were literally hundreds of new entrants."

Warner and Atari management became partners in a cover-up of how Atari was starting to suffer. Producing artificial reports and a trumped-up projection of earnings for the final part of 1982, members in both management groups began selling off shares to insulate themselves. The most notorious example was Ray Kassar himself, who did so shortly before the December 1982 announcement that earnings were far short of the previously announced projection. It eventually led to him being forced from his position at Atari by that summer, but the damage was already done to the industry.

The bubble bursts

Shock waves spread as investors began to question the viability of the entire videogame industry, and stock prices plummeted. Layoffs began at Atari that January, and throughout the rest of 1983 and 1984 many of these new competitors that Crawford had witnessed began closing. The videogame market crash had begun.

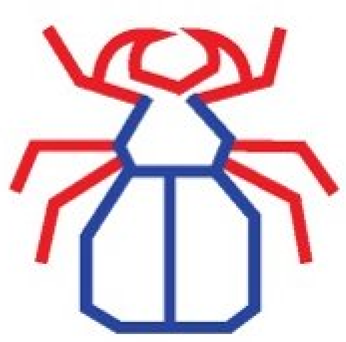
Atari tried to minimise its losses by starting up advanced research divisions in computing and graphics, as well as expanding its areas of consumer reach in markets like next-generation medical devices and telephone research. By September of 1983, Warner brought in James Morgan, VP of tobacco company Philip Morris, to replace Kassar and turn the company around. However, Warner began mounting heavier and heavier earnings and stock losses as Atari lost millions a day, and by winter of 1983 Warner itself was facing a hostile takeover by Australian publishing magnate Rupert Murdoch. In January of 1984, Warner brought in a firm to evaluate all its holdings and formulate a plan of action, and Atari was at the top of the list of subsidiaries that it was suggested to dump. The Murdoch takeover was averted that March after Warner bought out his stock, but the writing was already on the wall for Atari. Warner began looking for companies to buy it outright, but when it couldn't, Atari was split into pieces.

The consumer division and most of Atari's manufacturing and distribution capabilities were sold to Jack Tramiel in exchange for no money down and the taking on of most of Atari Inc's debt. Folding it into his Tramel Technologies Ltd (TTL), he renamed TTL to Atari Corporation and began a new chapter of the Atari brand in the consumer arena. The still-profitable coin division, responsible for Atari's arcade output, was initially kept and reformed as Atari Games, and soon after majority ownership was sold to Namco.

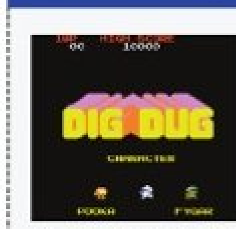
Much like a last-second swoop of the paddle in *Pong* to save you from your opponent scoring that winning point, the Atari brand was rescued from being completely wiped out in 1984 and would survive the crash. However, the drama, successes and failures were far from over…

To be continued…

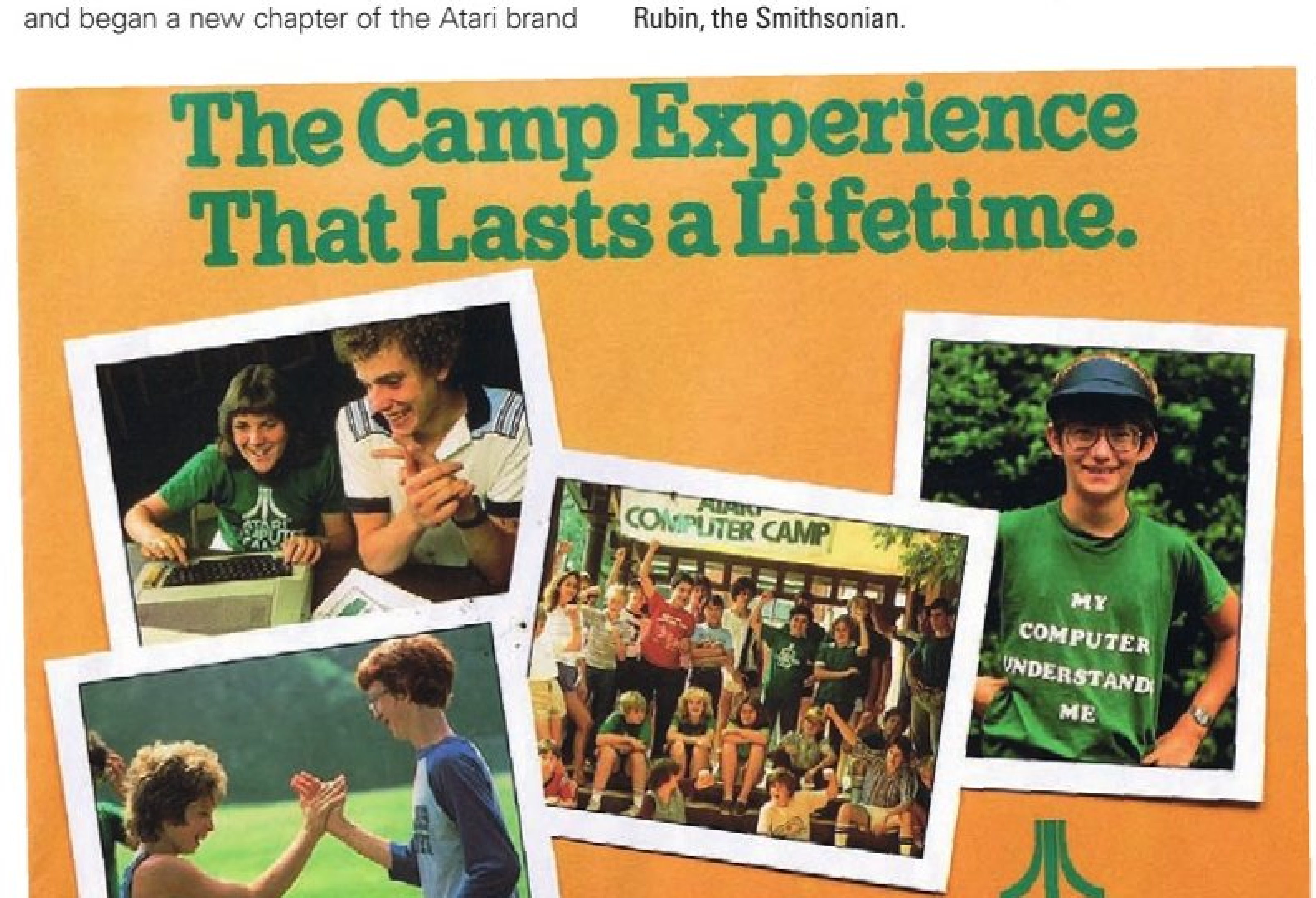
Special thanks: Curt Vendel, Jerry Jessop, Ted Dabney, Allan Alcorn, Steve Bristow, Owen Rubin, the Smithsonian.



THE NAMCO CONNECTION



In 1974, due to mounting losses, Atari decided to sell its fledgling Japanese operation, run by Hideyuki Nakajima, to Namco. Hideyuki agreed to stay on and run Namco's new division, which would initially release licensed Atari games before moving on to producing its own. Thus started a long partnership between the two companies. By the early Eighties it was Atari that was licensing Namco games, and these were such big hits that many are frequently regarded as Atari-created titles today, such as *Dig Dug*, *Pole Position* and *Xevious*. By February 1985, Namco purchased the Atari arcade division, by then known as Atari Games. Hideyuki was sent to oversee all of Namco's US operations, and by 1987 had pooled his own money together with other Atari Games employees to buy the company from Namco and make it employee-owned. Shortly after the purchase he created Tengen to allow Atari Games to enter the home console market. In 1994, Hideyuki and the rest of the Atari Games staff sold their company back to Warner, then known as Time Warner. Sadly, Hideyuki's long association with the Atari brand would itself end later that year when he passed away on 11 June 1994 from lung cancer.



» In the early Eighties, special summer camps dedicated to personal computers started springing up, with parents sending their kids in the hopes of getting a head start in this new field. Atari ran several camps across the US, where kids could program their Atari 800 in between distractions like swimming and hiking.

NODES of



Craig Grannell blasts off into space and tracks down Nodes Of Yesod programmer Steve Wetherill to chat about Odin's famous debut release, its surprisingly similar sequel, the third Yesod game that never was, and the game's iOS resurrection

Although hardly a giant of 8-bit gaming, Liverpool-based Odin was nonetheless a respected developer and publisher for a few short years in the Eighties, releasing a string of well-received arcade adventures. Perhaps the most memorable is its debut, *Nodes Of Yesod*, which unashamedly riffed off Ultimate's *Underwurlde*. But rather than merely being a cynically churned out third-rate facsimile of its famous contemporary, *Nodes* offered gamers of the day a similar level of production and flair. The game was a beautiful, huge flick-screen platform adventure, with slick graphic design and animation, boasting a charm and personality all of its own, along with a slightly oddball sense of humour simmering under the surface.

Perhaps the main character is what infused the game with its slightly left-field personality. Astro Charlie, as he was known internally, was derived from a Big Ears sprite animation that graphic artist Colin Grunes had developed for a *Noddy* title that never happened, which we're pretty sure wasn't the case for *Underwurlde*'s Sabreman. It's *Nodes* programmer Steve Wetherill who recalls that nugget of oddness – "If you look carefully, you can see Astro Charlie is wearing a suit, with a helmet and backpack added on," he points out – and he was just one of a surprisingly sizeable team for a mid-Eighties flick-screen platform adventure. Steve and George Barns worked on ZX Spectrum coding, while Keith Robinson, Marc Wilding and Robbie Tinman took the game to the C64. Colin Grunes, Stuart Fotheringham and Paul Salmon all crafted the art, while Fred Gray tinkled the digital ivories, assisted by Andy Walker on Spectrum sound coding – "He did the 'Welcome to *Nodes*' sampled audio playback code," says Steve. Meanwhile, Paul McKenna was running the business side of things.

From the very beginning, there was a desire to ensure that *Nodes* was a beautiful game. Steve admits that the team was "completely in awe of



IN THE KNOW

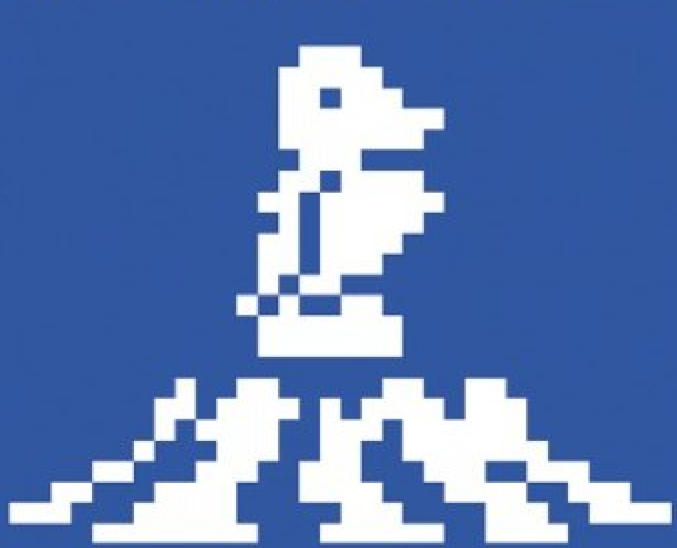
- » **PUBLISHER:** ODIN COMPUTER GRAPHICS
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- » **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM, C64, AMSTRAD CPC, ENTERPRISE 64/128, IOS
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM





YESOD

Ultimate" and desperate to "reach the same standard of graphics, animation and smooth gameplay demonstrated in that company's games". Therefore, while the basic hook and back story was worked on quickly – locate 'alchiems' on the moon to unlock the secrets of a black monolith straight from *2001: A Space Odyssey* – graphics for all of the screens were painstakingly crafted, with seemingly scant regard for technical ramifications. "All art was developed in Melbourne Draw, pixel by pixel, attribute by attribute," says Steve, who then had to figure out how to squeeze everything into the Spectrum and make it work – a task that had already claimed as a victim the game's original programmer. But Steve was the right man for the job, with relevant experience and a clear enthusiasm for the project itself. "When I arrived at Odin, which was probably early 1985, I remember being blown away by the somersaulting animation of Astro Charlie, which had been developed by Colin," he recalls. "In fact, this was the main reason I left Software Projects to go and work at Odin. But I also had a bunch of experience designing free-roaming platform games – at Software Projects, I'd worked with Derrick Rowson on the CPC version of *Jet Set Willy,* which more than doubled the Speccy original's number of rooms."



"Look carefully and Astro Charlie is wearing a suit, with a helmet and backpack added on!" STEVE ON RECYCLING SPRITES

And so Charlie's world began to take shape. Charlie became Charlemagne 'Charlie' Fotheringham-Grunes, named after two of the designers, and the moon's surface and caverns soon appeared for him to explore, along with a wall-munching mole and myriad creatures to attack him during his adventures. "After that, a sequence language and interpreter for enemies was developed, which allowed the artists to set start positions and movement paths for the sequenced enemies," explains Steve.

Although the game's visual appearance was key, plenty of effort was put into the map and fine-tuning the gameplay. "The general map layout was sketched out on paper in rough, before being realised in the map editor," says Steve. This editor enabled room components to be rapidly placed and moved, to ensure that all jumps between platforms were possible and that the gameplay was fun and balanced. "There was a lot of tuning of platform positions, jump distances, and so on. It was very meticulous work."

Adding to the workload was the rather organic approach that the team had taken. "There was

THE ARC OF YESOD

QUICKFIRE SEQUELS WERE hardly uncommon in the 8-bit gaming era, but Odin followed up *Nodes Of Yesod* surprisingly quickly, even for those days. Within the same year as the original game's release, sequel *The Arc Of Yesod* arrived; it followed on from its predecessor, with Fotheringham-Grunes having pursued the monolith to its home planet, where he was tasked with finally destroying it.

"*Arc Of Yesod* was really an iteration on the *Nodes Of Yesod* 'engine' and was done very quickly," admits Steve, recalling that he assisted on coding just enough to get the game finished, since he was then busy with *Robin Of The Wood*. "I think the graphics in *Arc* are really very well done, but the gameplay is very similar to *Nodes*. It was mostly an art and design exercise, and the game was released on the Thor label at a slightly lower price point than *Nodes*," he continues.

Although the game offered little new, bar artwork, room layouts and a couple of new features, such as a laser gun and collapsing walls, it was received well, narrowly missing out on a *Crash* Smash but scoring 9/10 in *Your Sinclair* and grabbing a Sizzler! award in *Zzap!64* for the C64 version.



» [Spectrum] *The Arc Of Yesod* is very similar to *Nodes*. Not surprising, given that they use the same engine.

THE HEART OF YESOD

ALTHOUGH THE *YESOD* series drew to a close with *The Arc Of Yesod*, Steve reveals that there were plans for a further follow-up. "We had this idea for a game called *Heart Of Yesod*," he explains, saying this came about after the demise of Odin. "Colin and I got together and did some prototype art and coding. The game was to be on the Atari ST and Amiga, and was to be a vertically scrolling platformer. The storyline took various elements from *Nodes* and from *Heartland*, and had a *Mr Benn*-type back story, with the protagonist visiting various worlds."

Although Steve had a demo of the game running, which featured full-colour sprites and platforms, the duo were unable to get the game off the ground. Sadly, Steve reveals that nothing remains of *Heart Of Yesod* today, bar a printout of the back story.

"An earlier, better version was lost, resulting in all of the rooms being done from scratch. Microdrives were pretty crappy, really" THE BENEFITS OF A DECENT BACKUP STRATEGY

definitely a 'high level' design in place – *Nodes* was to be a platform game, with great graphics and animation quality, and high performance. But in many cases, the details were not really thought out, or would be sitting in someone's head, and so there would be a fair degree of iteration of features as we worked on the game," admits Steve. "You'd have someone going, 'Why don't the gravity sticks work?' to a reply of, 'What's a gravity stick?', so the high-level stuff was nailed down well, but the detail stuff? Not so much!"

Throughout the process, the team would play through the game to ensure that everything worked as expected, although Steve notes that testing depended on how much playing time each team member could squeeze in. The combination of meticulous programming and graphic design meant those working on the game knew it inside out by the later stages of development, which ultimately skewed the game's difficulty level. "The lack of time team members could spend testing, combined with knowing the map layout intimately, led us to make a game that I think is probably too bloody hard in its original form," laughs Steve, who admits: "I could not say for sure that anyone on the team actually played the game to the end without cheating."

Another challenge that faced the team was its programming environment, which conspired against Odin more than once, even wiping an early version of the game. "The programming was done originally on the Spectrum using Microdrives as storage. We later moved to BBC Model Bs with Z80 second processors, running C/PM. We used Memo for text editing, and the M80/L80 assembler/linkers. We concocted various means of downloading to the Speccy, including Interface 1 RS232, and could not really debug at this point, other than by loading a 'monitor' program, which would allow us to disassemble memory," says Steve.

Part of the reason for the shift to BBC Micros was a Microdrive crash: "It's often been said that an earlier, better version of *Nodes* was lost, resulting in all of the rooms being done from scratch." And Steve says that while he doesn't recall a feature-complete version of the game being lost in this manner, a completed map layout of 256 screens was gone forever.

This perhaps explains the hectic conclusion to development: "Productivity was really high during the final weeks as we raced to the finish line," says Steve, adding: "Microdrives were pretty crappy, really."

However, the final product was anything but crappy. On the Spectrum, *Crash* punned that you'd be "over the moon" with the game, awarding it 93%; and the C64 conversion fared even better in *Zzap!64*, getting a massive 95% rating, with Gary Penn commending Odin's attention to detail, first-class graphics and atmospheric music. Similar praise was evident in other magazines, and it's therefore no surprise that Steve says the team was "very happy with the reception" and even the regular references to Ultimate games: "That wasn't really a criticism!"

Naturally, Steve also recalls the game's development as a great period in his career: "My favourite memories are mostly of camaraderie – we were all really good friends and used to hang out a lot outside of work. It was also a time of rapid learning as we gained experience building the game. We truly



» [Spectrum] Grab the mole on the moon's surface before venturing underground in *Nodes*.



» [Spectrum] Charlie stands still while the mole devours a wall, opening himself up to attack, the idiot.





» [iOS] Giant worms make your life difficult in the 'enhanced' iOS version of *Nodes*.





DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ROBIN OF THE WOOD
(PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, C64
YEAR: 1985

HEARTLAND
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, C64, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1986

SIDEWIZE
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, C64
YEAR: 1987

didn't realise how good we had it at Odin; the company was very well equipped, from development systems to modern office space."

Shortly after *Nodes* was released, Charlie got rewarded with a second adventure in *The Arc Of Yesod* (see boxout), a similar but equally well-received game. But the series then died with Odin, which quietly disappeared from the scene in 1987, unable to satisfactorily scale its operation. However, fast-forward nearly two decades and former Odin director Paul McKenna figured that his old company's products would be suitable for mobile; he resurrected Odin and with it *Nodes Of Yesod*.

"Paul and I ended up connecting a few years ago, after being out of touch for almost 20 years, and we discussed making mobile versions of *Nodes* and other Odin properties," confirms Steve, who at the time had several years of mobile game development under his belt.

The first iteration of a revised *Nodes* was created for Java phones, boasting more colourful graphics and new features such as a map. But Steve says the Java phone market was a nightmare for indies, due to device fragmentation. Luckily, a certain Cupertino company subsequently loomed into view, saving the project. "The mobile market basically went totally to the iPhone," affirms Steve. "And while I in 2010 made the move from mobile to mainstream PC development with Petroglyph, I couldn't resist making just one more iPhone game…" The 25th anniversary edition of *Nodes Of Yesod* therefore became a labour of love for Steve, developed in the evenings and the wee small hours, over a period of a few months in late 2010.

The game itself, released in November that year, boasts two modes. The 'classic' version is essentially the Spectrum release, but without the attribute clash that plagued that machine and featuring the superior music from the C64 game. The other mode is dubbed 'enhanced', which has the modern graphics that were originally created for the Java game, along with a bunch of new features; these include a help system, giant moon worms, a lunar lander, a number of bonus rooms and a new end-game sequence. Both versions also have save capability.

"The original game is quite hardcore, so I ended up adding a save game feature to the classic mode as well as the enhanced one," explains Steve. "Apart from anything else, I wanted to make sure I could make it through the entire game, which was really tough without the save system!" Steve adds that none of the iOS game is emulated; it was instead built from scratch. Nonetheless, he considers it "very close to the original in terms of gameplay" and reckons even the enhanced mode retains the core gameplay of the 8-bit release.

Purists might be irked by such changes, but the iOS game at least ensures that *Nodes Of Yesod* lives on, with Astro Charlie bouncing around increasingly modern hardware, avoiding a motley bunch of surreal foes and forever searching for those 'alchiems'. "The Eighties were truly pioneering, revolutionary times," considers Steve about the game's longevity. "I think people look back on those days with a nostalgic fondness. Games then were obviously much, much simpler, and that's also appealing."



Werewolves Of London

HOW TO BE A COMPLETE MONSTER

RETROREVIVAL



» AMSTRAD CPC
» VIZ DESIGN
» 1988

While it appears the done thing to condemn modern videogames for glamorising violence, retro games could still be seen to be pushing the boundaries of taste and decency. While the likes of *How To Be A Complete Bastard* and *Viz* were good for providing short fixes of puerile humour when your mates popped round after school, in terms of violence few titles could match *Werewolves Of London*.

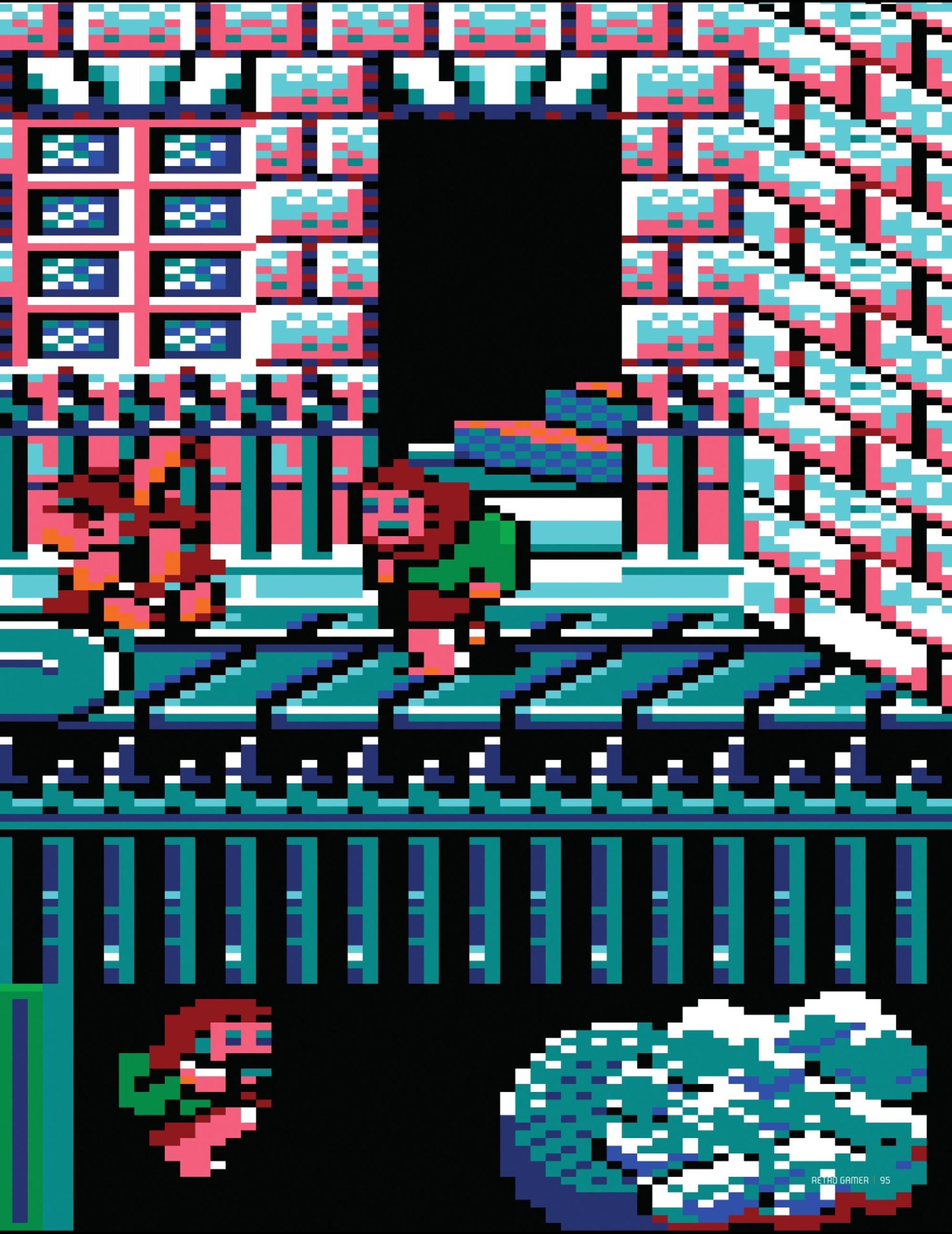
Written by Stephen Howard and Paul Smith, *Werewolves* was a spiritual sequel to the duo's earlier *Bride Of Frankenstein*, and was a similar search-a-thon with chunky, attention-grabbing cartoon graphics.

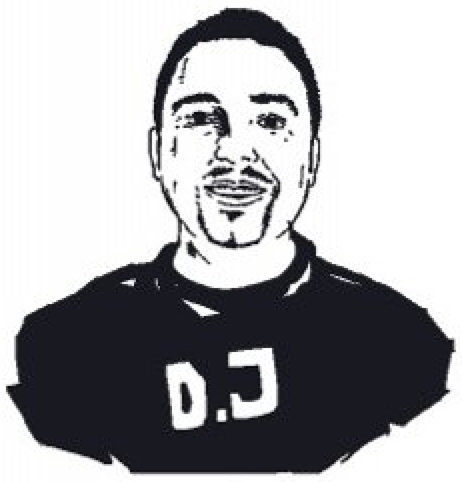
As its title implies, the game sees you take on the role of a poor Londoner who has contracted a case of lycanthropy, which, it transpires, was imposed on him by a family of yuppie aristocrats. How or why is never explained, but in order to lift the curse the player must venture out onto the streets to locate and kill all eight members of the family.

Of course, getting away with murder is never easy, and as soon as the first victim has been masticated into a bloody mess the police come out in full force armed silver bullets and silver handcuffs. Taking a bullet will slowly deplete your energy, represented by a blood-bag at the bottom of the screen, while arrest from a bobby will see you spend a night in the clink, released at sunrise when you have reverted back to human form.

The daytime provides the best moments to investigate into the whereabouts of your targets, and when one is nearby a crucifix will appear on-screen and flicker in relation to how close they are. There are also a number of handy pick-ups, ranging from a wrench used to jimmy open manhole covers, torches to light up the sewers accessed by jimmying open manhole covers, and bandages to stem the flow of blood from gunshot wounds. And you can even dine on pedestrians and police, should you need a quick energy boost.

While a recent revisit showed the gameplay to be repetitive, the map confusing at times, and the gameplay initially puzzling as it never explicitly spells out what you have to do, *Werewolves Of London* remains an unusual, quirky and entertaining game. *





>> Due to the time of year it's been relatively quiet for physical releases. But there's a huge number of digital games to play, and we've bought back the often asked for Retro Round-Up section. Enjoy.

Galaga Legions DX

30 YEARS OLD AND STILL GOING STRONG

XBLA

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** 800 POINTS (£6.40)
- » **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO BANDAI
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» Currently celebrating its 30th year *Galaga* has gone on to become one of Namco's most popular shoot-'em-up franchise. It's been celebrating in fine style as well, with a *30th Anniversary Collection* recently released on iOS and an incoming one for Nintendo's 3DS.



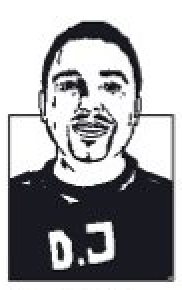
» [XBLA] As with *Legions* before it, *DX* uses twin-stick shooter mechanics. Tapping the bumpers switches between a spread and concentrated burst of fire.

✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Galaga Legions DX

>> ***Galaga*** **has been released for over nine different consoles and computers including Atari 7800, MSX and Sega's SG-1000**

>> **Namco leant Matthew Broderick an arcade machine while he was working on the popular Eighties movie** ***WarGames***



After being mightily impressed with Namco's *DX* treatment of *Pac-Man Championship*, we were eager to see if it could work the same magic with its *Galaga* franchise.

Galaga Legions DX doesn't offer the same giddy adrenalin rush that *Pac-Man* offered, but it remains an exceptionally good shooter and a surprisingly accessible one to boot. Part of the *Namco Generations* range, the ethos behind the series is creating straightforward, easy to enjoy titles that anyone should be able to play. *Galaga Legions DX* follows this to the letter, and while it's seems almost too simple for its own good, like *Pac-Man Championship DX* it offers a surprising amount of depth and replay value.

As with *Galaga Legions* before it, you're presented with a wave of attacking Galagas that must be eliminated as quickly as possible. Each stage (of which there are nine) is split into five sections, which are further split into a number of distinct waves. You have a set amount of time to clear these waves, before moving onto the next section. The quicker you clear the first four stages of enemies, the more time you'll earn to tackle the last section. It's a clever little system that allows you to rack up some insanely high scores, mainly because all your points are doubled here and you'll have access to the Galaga Trap, a useful item that you'll already recognise if you've already played the enjoyable *Galaga Legions*.

Looking like an ominous blackhole, the Galaga Trap is an extremely useful device that will suck all nearby Galaxians into it once it's been destroyed. These ships will then immediately follow yours, making your firepower even more devastating than it already is. Hitting enemies will cause you to quickly shed your followers, so be sure to keep hold of them for as long as possible, as they greatly boost your overall score. Other nice touches include slowing the screen down when you graze too close to an enemy (just like in *Pac-Man DX*) and the ability to switch between two distinct fire patterns.

Fast and furious, *Galaga Legions DX*'s biggest issue is that, like *Pac-Man Championship Edition DX* before it, it plays very similar to its predecessor. Of course this is no bad thing when the original is a perfectly entertaining blaster in its own right, but it would have been nice to have a bit more variety. Admittedly they are additional stages to master beyond the original 'Championship Mode' and the online Time Trials offer plenty of longevity, but it's impossible to escape a slight feeling of déjà vu, even if *DX* offers far batter value for money than its enjoyable predecessor.

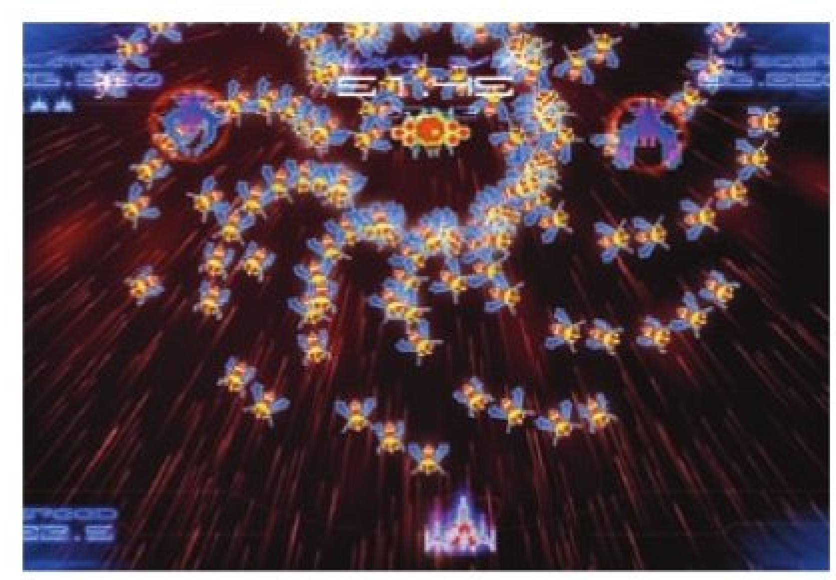
✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
GALAGA '88 (ARCADE)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
GALAGA LEGIONS (XBLA)





OPINION



Fans of 2008's *Galaga Legions* will probably view *DX* as more a wonderful fine tuning than an out-and-out sequel, and there's certainly nowt wrong with that, because the original was such a cracking shooter to begin with. Like its predecessor and *Pac-Man* counterpart, *DX* is a game of undeniable polish and a resplendent update of a Namco classic. It comes highly recommended.

Stuart Hunt

In a Nutshell

While it plays it rather safe, *Galaga Legions DX* is a cracking little shoot-'em-up that gives the long-running franchise a much-needed boost. Here's hoping *Galaga Dimensions* will be up to a similar high standard.

>> Score **82%**

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Galaga Legions DX
It's little more than a retread of the original, but I've still been enjoying Namco's sequel.



STUART
Deathsmiles
The controls are sometimes an issue, but this remains an impressive port.



DAVID
James Pond In The Deathly Shallows
I play, if only to see how far the aquatic agent has fallen.



» [iOS] Being a Jeff Minter game, camels and other ungulates feature heavily.





OPINION

iOS appears to be the making of Minter, giving him a fresh lease of life. Although *Deflex* isn't a brand new release from him, it works amazingly well on iPad (less so on the iPhone's smaller screen) and proves that sometimes old games really are the best.

Darran Jones

Deflex

JEFF MINTER

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** iOS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £1.49 » **PUBLISHER:** LLAMASOFT » **DEVELOPER:** JEFF MINTER » **PLAYERS:** 1



Jeff Minter certainly seems to have found his mojo since moving over to Apple's iOS format. Although *Minotaur Rescue* and *Minotron 2112* were both hardcore shooters, Minter's latest release takes a far more abstract approach, and in some respects, is all the better for it.

Deflex isn't exactly a new game, being an update of an early Minter release, also called *Deflex,* for the Commodore Vic 20 (*Deflex* itself later received an update for the Spectrum called *Superdeflex* in 1982). The core concept is extremely similar, however, and the end result is that *Deflex* is yet another enjoyable score-based game that fans of high-score chasing will get a lot of satisfaction from. Unlike Minter's last two iOS releases, though, the score chasing itself never feels quite as frantic (no bad thing in itself). This in part is due to the wonderfully laid-back approach that *Deflex* adopts. If Minter's last game *Minotron 2112* was a raging storm of gaudy pixels and floating minotaurs, then *Deflex* is the Zen-like calm that follows.

Each single level, of which there are 52, is filled with a number of weird looking objects and hazards, ranging from camels and yaks (no Minter game would be complete without them) to *My Little Pony*s and telephones. A small ball constantly moves across the screen and you must drop bats to alter the sphere's path so that it can collect every available item. What's interesting here, however, is that a struck bat will immediately change its direction through 90°, ensuring that when the ball once again strikes it, it will head off in a completely different direction. There's also a score multiplier to consider that continually ticks down if the ball doesn't contact anything. Leave it too long and the ball eventually evaporates and you'll need to restart the level.

Free of the difficulty spikes that affected *Minotaur Rescue* and accompanied by some nice soothing piano music, *Deflex* is a wonderfully relaxing game that's extremely difficult to put down.

>> Score 86%

James Pond In The Deathly Shallows

THE BEST THING IS ITS NAME

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** iOS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £0.69 » **PUBLISHER:** HPN ASSOCIATES LIMITED » **DEVELOPER:** GAMEWARE » **PLAYERS:** 1

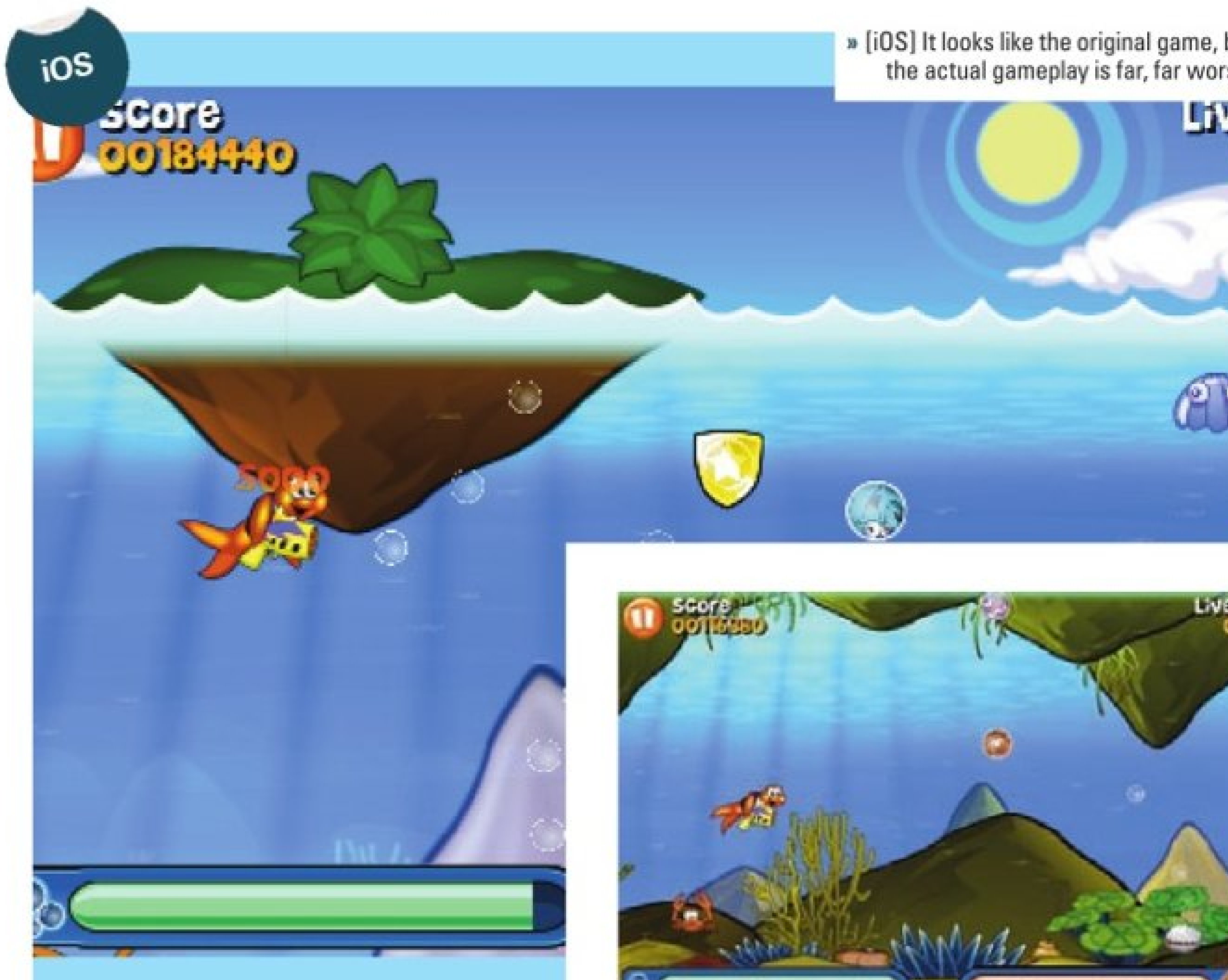


James Pond's underwater antics have always divided gamers over the years, but even the staunchest of fans will find it hard to defend this monstrosity. Designed to look extremely similar to the original 1990 Amiga game, *Deathly Shallows* has a good idea at its core, but is let down by poor controls, horrendous collision detection and amazingly ropy level design.

Tapping the screen makes James swim and he'll automatically shoot at nearby enemies. Touching the screen for longer causes him to reverse (handy for avoiding hazards) but also uses up his oxygen, once depleted the fish will drop to the seabed. Luckily bubbles from clams will replenish it, but a bigger problem is your health bar, which rapidly depletes when you hit enemies or get constantly stuck on rocks and other outcroppings.

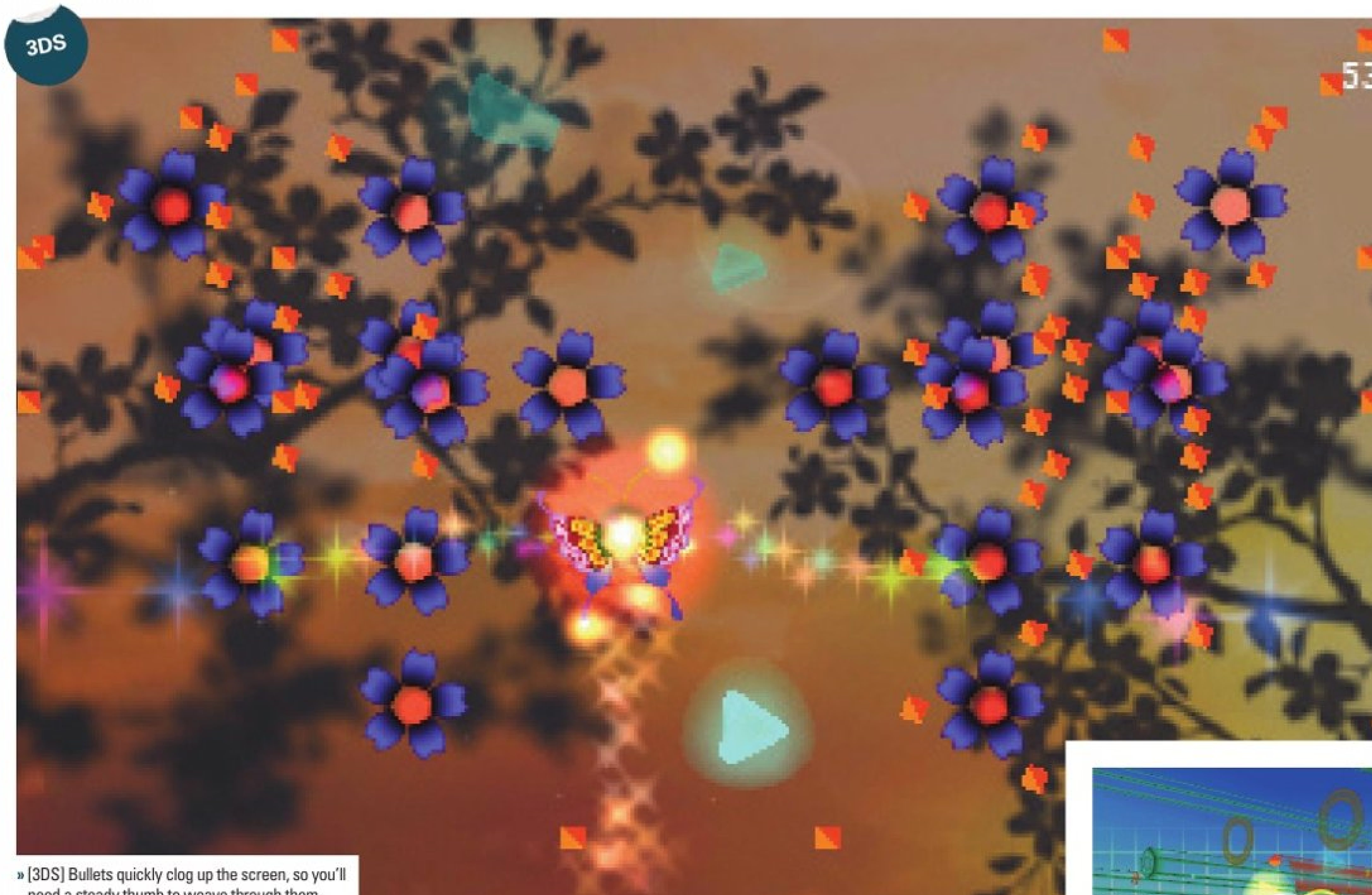
Yes, there are points to chase and numerous items to collect, but the bland level design, frustrating enemy patterns and poor controls make chasing consistent high scores an effort in futility. Even at 69 pence it's far too overpriced. A dreadful effort, although we did kind of like its puntastic title. Save your money, or simply replay *RoboCod.*

>> Score 22%



» [iOS] It looks like the original game, but the actual gameplay is far, far worse.

3DS



» [3DS] Bullets quickly clog up the screen, so you'll need a steady thumb to weave through them.

✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Dream Trigger 3D

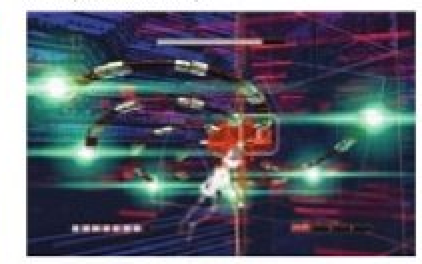
>> Art Co has been involved with numerous licences, including Disney Princess, Shaun the Sheep and *Flushed Away*

>> One of its most impressive moments was *Every Extend Extra* for the PSP. It was a collaboration with Q Entertainment.

✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

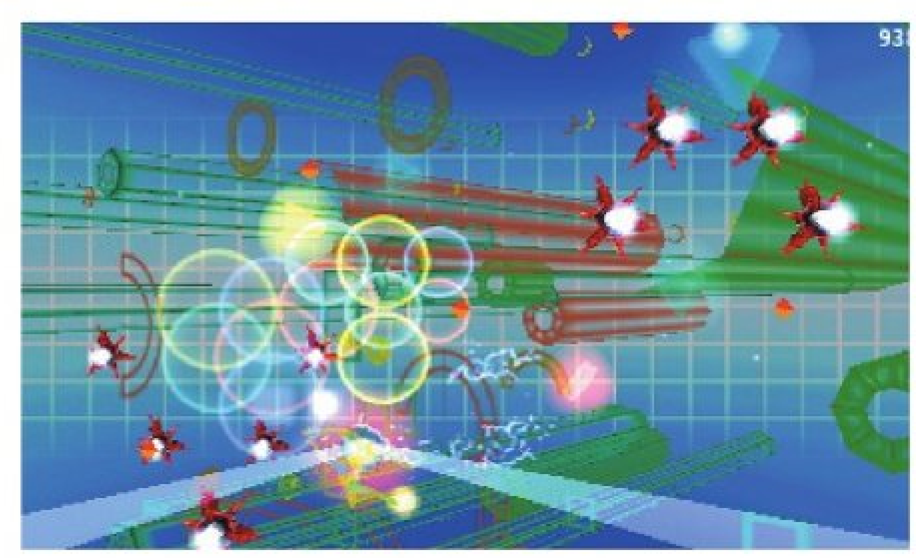
REZ (DREAMCAST)



▽ SOMETHING NEW

EVERY EXTEND EXTRA (PSP)





IT'S MORE LIKELY TO TRIGGER A NIGHTMARE THAN A DREAM

Dream Trigger 3D



***Dream Trigger 3D* is a difficult game to love. Created by Japanese developer Art Co, it comes across as a shoot-'em-up that's a little too clever for its own good, due to some really quite complex gameplay mechanics.**

The top screen is where the vast majority of the action takes place. Aiming a reticle, which takes many different forms depending on the level you're currently on, you simply have to shoot down enemy ships while avoiding the many bullets they spew out. Easy in itself, except the actual enemies are invisible and can only be seen as small blobs of light.

To make them appear, you must touch the grid found on the bottom screen, which acts as a radar. A *Lumines*-like bar continually moves across the second screen, and its speed is governed by the beat of each music track. When it hits one of the points that you've touched, a 'ping' will be sent out in the very same place on the top screen. Any enemy hit by this, which appears as a small explosion, will become visible, allowing you to shoot it down with your ship's equipped laser.

INFORMATION

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS
» **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £39.99
» **PUBLISHER:** D3 PUBLISHER
» **DEVELOPER:** ART CO
» **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» Developer Art Co is a private company that was established in 1995. Its main focus has been on licensed games and handhelds, and it has been responsible for titles such as *Britney's Dance Beat* for the GBA and the excellent *Every Extend Extra*, a collaboration with Q Entertainment.

It's an admittedly clever trick, but one that is far too complicated for its own good – kind of like patting your head and rubbing your tummy at the same time. Trying to watch two screens at the same time is nearly impossible to manage effectively, and our eventual tactic was to simply try to smear as much of the lower screen as possible with a thumb in the hope that it would trigger huge chain reactions on the top screen.

The structure of the main game mode is also something of a chore to get through. Levels are linked to each other, and you must touch the adjacent planet in order to travel to it. This approach is fine when the game is just starting out, but it becomes increasingly annoying when you want to travel over half the world map to tackle a specific stage. There are three additional gameplay modes, including Time Attack and a surprisingly good multiplayer mode, which plays like a cool version of Battleships, but it's simply not enough to justify the excessively high asking price.

Once you've sussed out the needlessly fiddly game mechanics, *Dream Trigger 3D*'s difficulty effectively plateaus, offering no additional challenge, even on the later levels. Yes, there are some extremely nice *Star Fox*-style bosses to encounter along the way, which spit out cool 3D-enhanced projectiles at you, and the 3D effects give the game an excellent sense of depth, but it lacks the critical challenge that truly great shmups offer. A very disappointing effort.

OPINION



I'm sorry, but after the admittedly brief time I had with *Dream Trigger*, I just didn't see the appeal at all. Shooters are supposed to feel intuitive, responsive, exhilarating and, above all, effortless to operate, and I found this to be none of those things. I simply don't get it.

Stuart Hunt

In a Nutshell

Master the difficult mechanics and you'll quickly realise that you've seen everything *Dream Trigger 3D* has to offer. It would have worked brilliantly as a download title.

>> Score **56%**

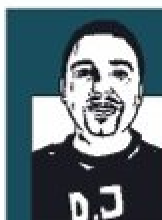
iOS



» [iPhone] *Pac-Chomp!* is solid enough but is light on game modes and therefore longevity. It is less than two quid, though, so perhaps the fact that it's not overflowing with content is forgivable.

» [iPhone] Allowing you to rotate the four corners of the board adds a refreshing twist to the match-three formula.





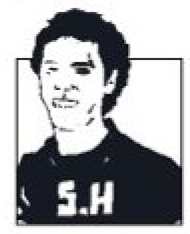
OPINION

It's certainly an interesting spin on the formula, but *Pac-Chomp!* lacks the immediacy and addictive nature of the games it's trying to emulate. It's good to see Namco continually trying fresh things with its mascot, but *Pac-Chomp!* is one of his more disappointing puzzle outings.

Darran Jones

Pac-Chomp!

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** iOS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £1.49 ($1.99) » **PUBLISHER:** NAMCO » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1



In a move that can hardly be seen as setting the world of originality alight, Namco Bandai's latest App Store release is a match-three puzzle game starring its long-running hero, Pac-Man.

Indeed, anyone familiar with games like *Bejeweled* or *Puzzle Quest* will feel instantly at home with *Pac-Chomp!*, as it sees you trying to match up three or more ghosts of the same colour to make them disappear and fill up a time meter as it slowly depletes.

To be fair, a small handful of new mechanics are added to the formula to keep things interesting, and for the most part they work fairly well. Matching four ghosts of the same colour will cause a useful power-up to appear in their place, while matching five of the cute critters releases a power pellet, which allows Pac-Man to move freely around the board and gobble down as many ghosts as he can – a nice nod to the original 1980 arcade game and an opportunity to maximise your score. You also have the freedom to rotate the four corners of the board to open up more ghost-matching options if none are available – although failure to match any if you do this results in a hefty chunk of time being stripped from your meter.

Our biggest bugbear with *Pac-Chomp!* is more to do with the lack of imaginative game modes found within it. There are three modes of play, and one of them can be classed as an extra difficulty level, as the time runs down quicker. Another is just a 60-second Score Attack mode, which you'll probably just play once and never return to again.

Fans of match-three puzzlers who are looking for a game that does something a little different with the formula won't go far wrong with *Pac-Chomp!*, but don't expect it to grip your attention for very long.

» Score **64%**

iOS



Z

» **SYSTEM:** iOS
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **The Bitmaps' popular** capture the flag RTS classic arrives on the iPhone, and the action is as tough as we remember, which is funny when you consider the simple mechanics. While we found the touch-screen controls surprisingly fiddly for lassoing and marshalling troops to destinations, and the lack of new stages disappointing, this remains a faithful and solid translation for fans of the original.

» Score **72%**

iOS



Deathsmiles

» **SYSTEM:** iOS
» **PRICE:** £7.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Cave delivers us** yet another astounding iOS port of one of its fantastic and frenetic shooters, and though it is a bit on the pricey side, and suffers due to you occassionally filling the screen with your thimb, its unquestionable quality and slickness makes it well worth the money, in our opinion. The controls work brilliantly, and the new iPhone mode, character and music are the icing on the cake.

» Score **86%**

360



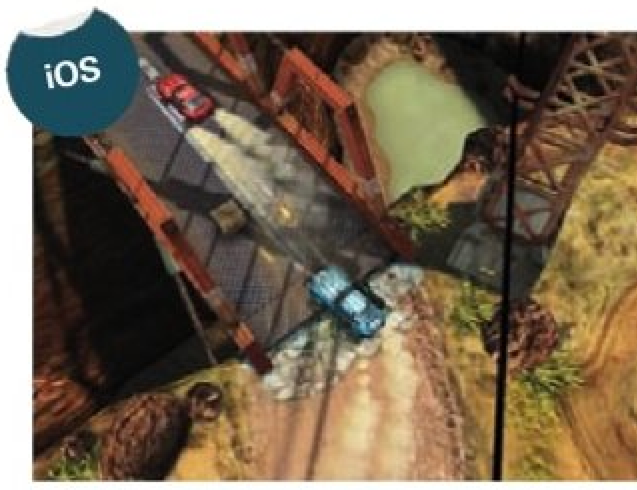
Dungeons & Dragons: Daggerdale

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
» **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

» **Being huge fans** of hack-'em-ups, we had high hopes for this latest *Dungeons & Dragons* release. Sadly, it's a forgettable slog that suffers due to bland visuals, tedious fetch quests and numerous glitches, such as enemies freezing in place or the whole game locking up. Endlessly repetitive and with boring combat, this besmirches the good name of *D&D* and is best avoided.

» Score **36%**

iOS



Death Rally

» **SYSTEM:** iOS
» **PRICE:** £0.69 » **PLAYERS:** 1

» **Fans of *RC Pro-Am*** and *Rock N' Roll Racing* will find a lot to like in *Death Rally*. This update of a 1996 PC game takes place in a rusty, post-apocalyptic world where the aim is to win by any means necessary. Victory earns you cash to spend on new weapons, vehicles and upgrades, and the action is kept interesting through a nice array of different race modes. A well-crafted package.

» Score **80%**

RETROROUND-UP

>> Every month we take a look at the latest classics that have been re-released for a new generation of gamers

✱ DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH

The Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening



INFORMATION
» **System:** Game Boy Color
» **Buy it for:** £6.40
» **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★★★

Heralded by many fans as the best *Zelda* game in the series, it's not hard to see why *Link's Awakening* has built up such a strong following over the years. The dungeon design throughout is absolutely sublime and fiendishly clever in places, the story is genuinely touching and expertly paced, and the varied inhabitants of Koholint Island are full of charm and character. Based around Link's quest to awaken the mystical Wind Fish, *Link's Awakening* is a colossal adventure that's easily worth its relatively high asking price. The 3DS's button layout does make the combination required to save rather difficult, but it's a small price to pay. *Link's Awakening* is arguably his best handheld adventure and the perfect dessert after *Ocarina Of Time 3D*.

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



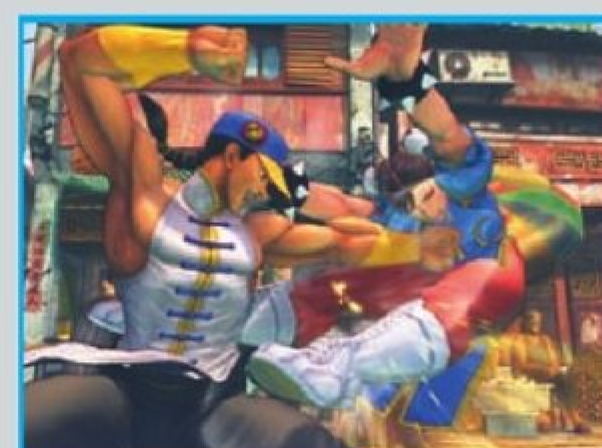
Chrono Trigger
» **System:** SNES
» **Buy it for:** 900 Points (£6.40)
» **Buy it from:** Wii Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★★★
» Even now, some 16 years after its original release on the Super Nintendo, *Chrono Trigger* remains a startlingly inventive game. Full of genuinely engaging characters, multiple endings and clever plot turns, it's a magnificent RPG that, like the best of wines, simply gets better with age. This Virtual Console debut is well overdue and is far easier on the wallet than its physical counterpart.



Donkey Kong '94
» **System:** Game Boy
» **Buy it for:** £3.60
» **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★★★
» There's already a cracking selection of Game Boy games on the 3DS's Virtual Console, and *Donkey Kong '94* is no exception. Starting off as an extremely faithful rendition of the original arcade game, it soon transforms into an amazingly inventive and hard as nails platformer. Full of clever ideas and mechanics, it's a real shame that the series never continued in the same way on the DS.



Magic Carpet
» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
» **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
» **Score:** ★★★★☆
» Yes, it looks rather simplistic nowadays, but there's no denying the power of Bullfrog's strategy-based shooter. The clever gameplay still holds up, while the challenging enemies and large number of levels mean there's excellent value for money. It's just a shame that Good Old Games didn't include the *Hidden Worlds* expansion pack for the sake of completeness. Even so, it's a fantastic game.



Super Street Fighter IV Arcade Edition
» **System:** PS3/360/PC
» **Buy it for:** Approximately £11.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN/Xbox Live/Steam
» **Score:** ★★★★☆
» Capcom's third addition to *Street Fighter IV* adds numerous tweaks and another four characters, swelling the roster to an impressive 39. *Street Fighter III*'s Yun and Yang are joined by Evil Ryu and Oni, ensuring that fans will have plenty of new moves to learn. It's not as much of an upgrade as *Super Street Fighter IV*, but it's still the best fighter currently available.

▼ VIRTUAL CONSOLE

The Wii's line-up is rather weak, but the 3DS fares far better

Double Dragon
» **System:** Game Boy
» **Buy it for:** £2.70
» **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Kirby's Dream Land
» **System:** Game Boy
» **Buy it for:** £3.60
» **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

Super Adventure Island
» **System:** SNES
» **Buy it for:** 800 Points (£5.80)
» **Buy it from:** Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Super Adventure Island 2
» **System:** SNES
» **Buy it for:** 800 Points (£5.80)
» **Buy it from:** Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

▼ PC SERVICES

Our tip for the month? Download the *Gabriel Knight* trilogy now

Atlantis
» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
» **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Gabriel Knight: Sins Of The Fathers
» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** €4.99 (£4.39)
» **Buy it from:** www.dotemu.com
» **Score:** ★★★★★

Gabriel Knight 2: The Beast Within
» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** €4.99 (£4.39)
» **Buy it from:** www.dotemu.com
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

Gabriel Knight 3: Blood Of The Sacred, Blood Of The Damned
» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** €4.99 (£4.39)
» **Buy it from:** www.dotemu.com
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Litil Devil
» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
» **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
» **Score:** ★★☆☆☆

Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc
» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
» **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
» **Score:** ★★☆☆☆

UFO: Afterlight
» **System:** PC
» **Buy it for:** €8.99 (£7.90)
» **Buy it from:** www.dotemu.com
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

▼ PSN

Only Namco's releases stop this from being a poor PSN month

Gex: Deep Cover Gecko
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Buy it for:** £7.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN
» **Score:** ★★☆☆☆

Motor Toon Grand Prix 2
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Buy it for:** £3.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN
» **Score:** ★★☆☆☆

Ridge Racer Type 4
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Buy it for:** £3.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

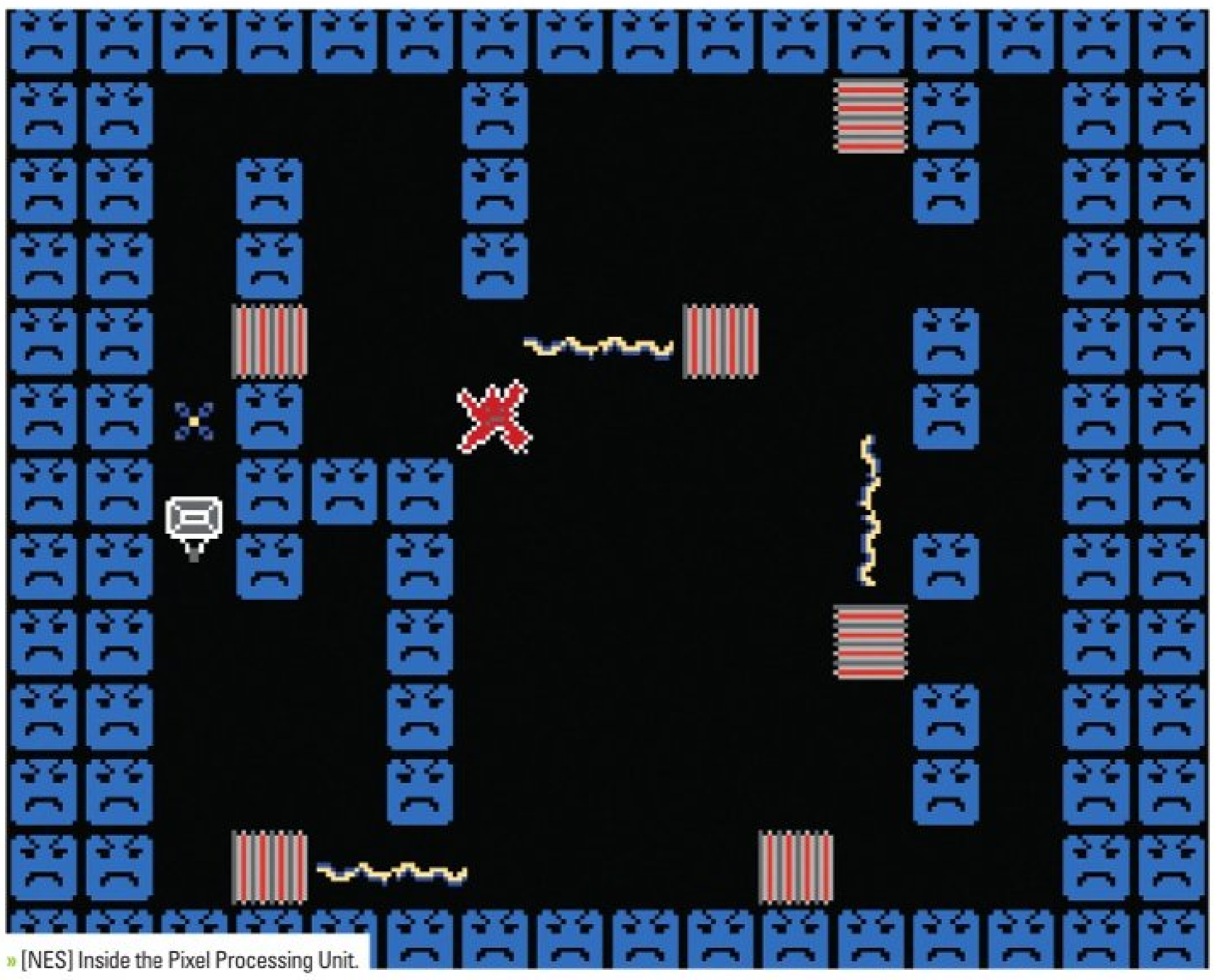
Tekken
» **System:** PlayStation
» **Buy it for:** £3.99
» **Buy it from:** PSN
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

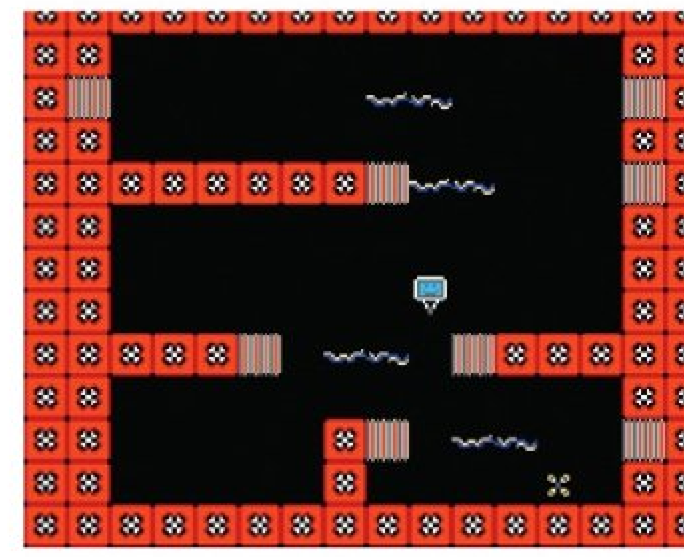


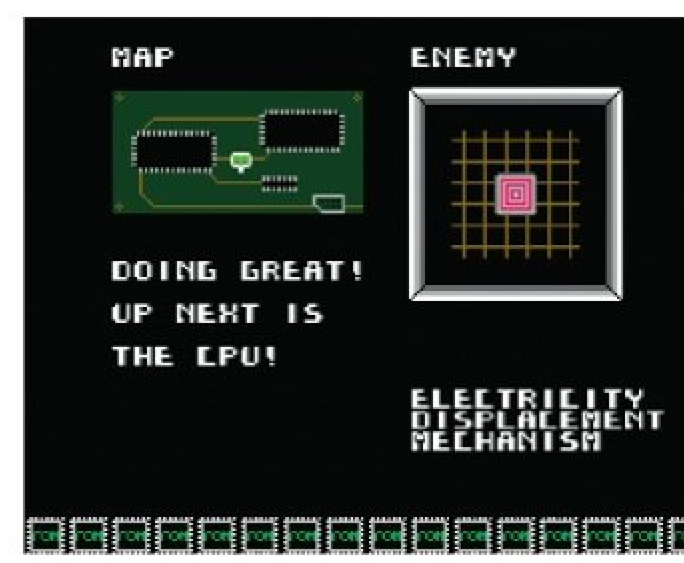
One thing that worries me as an indie developer is the slightly tenuous grip that some of my peers seem to have on reality. Not that I consider my own to be particularly strong, but even after the years I've spent writing and playing games there are still moments where I find myself wondering where on earth their ideas come from! Hopefully it isn't the result of imbibing too much caffeine…

NES VIRUS CLEANER

CLEANING UP THE NES, ONE IC AT A TIME


» [NES] Inside the Pixel Processing Unit.







» **FORMAT:** NES
» **DEVELOPED BY:** SLY DOG STUDIOS
» **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/NES-VIRUS-CLEANER
» **RELEASE DATE:** 2011
» **PRICE:** FREE

The Nintendo Entertainment System isn't a machine that is usually associated with viruses because it's quite difficult to write one that can actually transmit itself between cartridges. But *NES Virus Cleaner* would be a very short game if we were to let reality become involved, so for the moment let's ignore that and assume that these viruses are not only capable of infecting a NES, but can do irreparable damage to the poor machine if not dealt with in a timely manner.

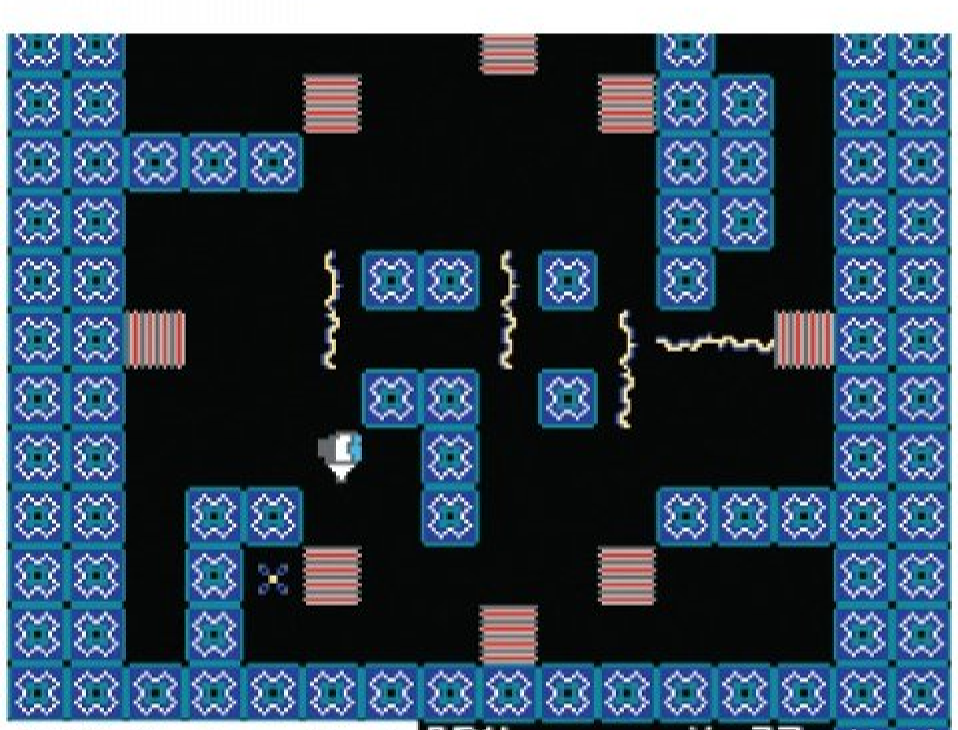
A human engineer would, of course, be far too large to go rooting around the microscopic rooms buried deep within a console's integrated circuitry, but help is at hand in the form of Clik, a friendly virus-cleaning droid who is microscopic in size and only too willing to help with the disinfection of the player's machine. Clik is steered from the D-pad and, once set in motion, will trundle his entire length in that direction before coming to a stop and accepting a new command. Clik also has a teleporter available that can be dropped with the A button and, after it has been positioned, a second stab of A will instantly transport him to its position. Pressing B cancels the current teleporter so that another one can be laid.

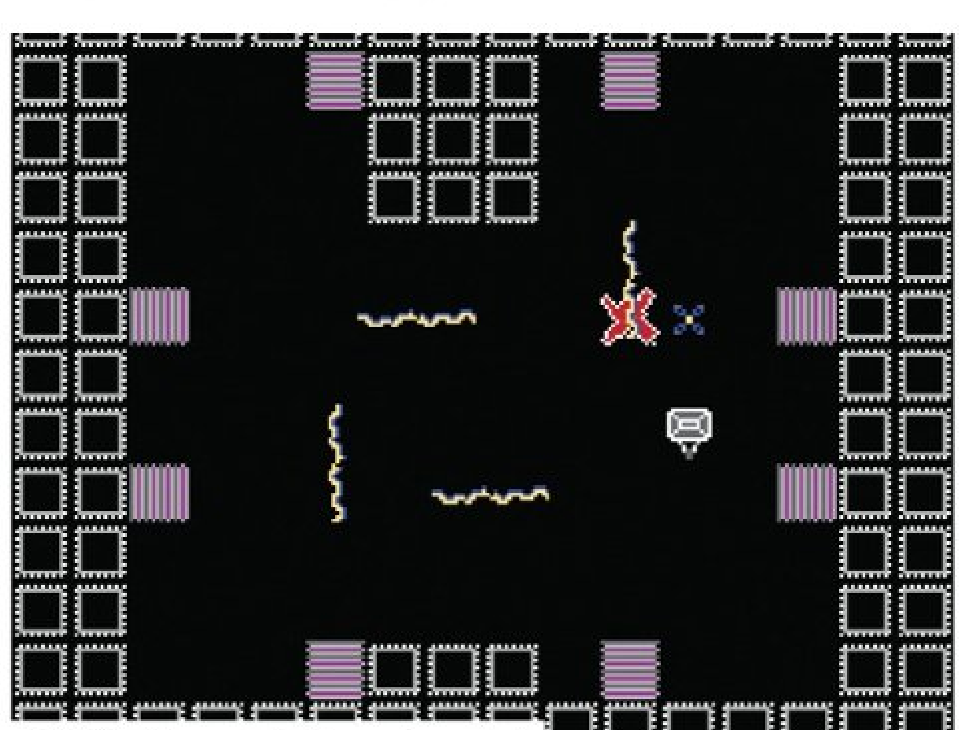
The battles with the viruses are fought within 17 rooms, which are situated deep in the various chips of the NES, with the final crucial round taking place inside the core of the infection itself. There's only one virus on screen at any time, and neutralising it is simply a matter of driving Clik into it, which, along with a score bonus, adds a few seconds to the timer at the left-hand side of the status panel. If it wasn't for the game-ending payload that the viruses deliver if that timer should expire, they would be harmless, not affecting the workings of the machine or Clik himself, who has presumably been designed with immunity in mind.

What can prove harmful, however, are the large sparks of electricity bouncing back and forth, and other electrified elements within the NES that are introduced as the game progresses and are presumably part of what makes it tick. Being zapped isn't a serious worry for Clik because he doesn't have to concern himself with a lives counter, but being reduced to atoms does lose him some precious seconds and knocks points off the final score at the same time.

The graphics certainly aren't amazing for the NES compared to other recent homebrews such as *Blade Buster*, but at the same time they're okay, if a little repetitive; Clik himself is probably the best-looking element of the entire game, vaguely resembling a CRT monitor displaying a face that has been balanced on a unicycle. 17 stages might not sound a lot, but what's on offer here isn't a pushover to navigate; the teleporter does make getting around easier on the later stages, but it comes with a significant score penalty for each use.

85%


» [NES] Shall I cough on you, George?

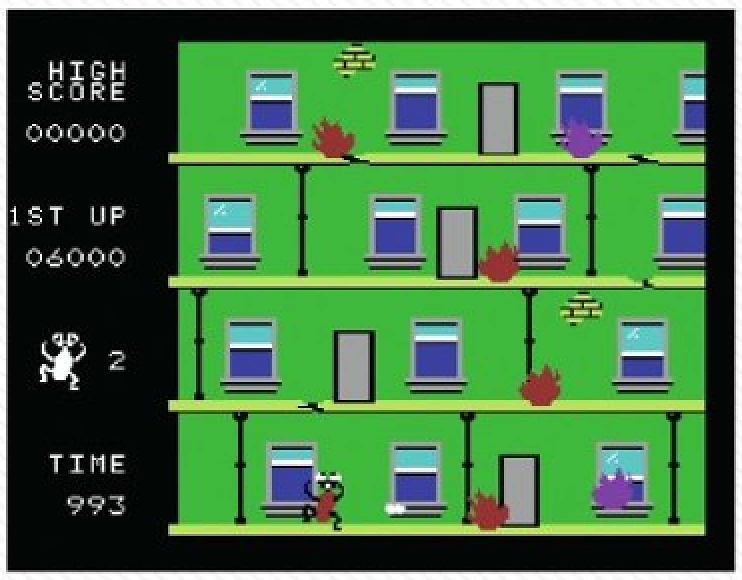

» [NES] Kills 99 per cent of all known viruses dead.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

FRANTIC FREDDY

» **FORMAT:** C64 » **DEVELOPER:** UNDONE » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/FRANTIC-FREDDY » **PRICE:** FREE



» [C64] Being a fireman is a high (water) pressure job.

Frantic Freddy is half man, half extinguisher but all fireman, so when an apartment building catches fire, there's only one person to call. The people have already been evacuated, but their poor moggies will need catching as they leap from the windows. Each level is made up of two stages; the first sees Freddy at the foot of the building, spraying water onto fires to extinguish them and dodging falling debris, while the second has him firing horizontally and clambering between floors via drain pipes.

The sound and graphics have been based directly on the original *Frantic Freddy*, developed by Spectravideo back in 1983, and the C64 re-creates that experience well. It might be a simple game, but there are the two stages to each level and four difficulty settings, which add the falling cats and re-igniting blazes to give Freddy's life a bit of variety.

77%

OCTOPUS

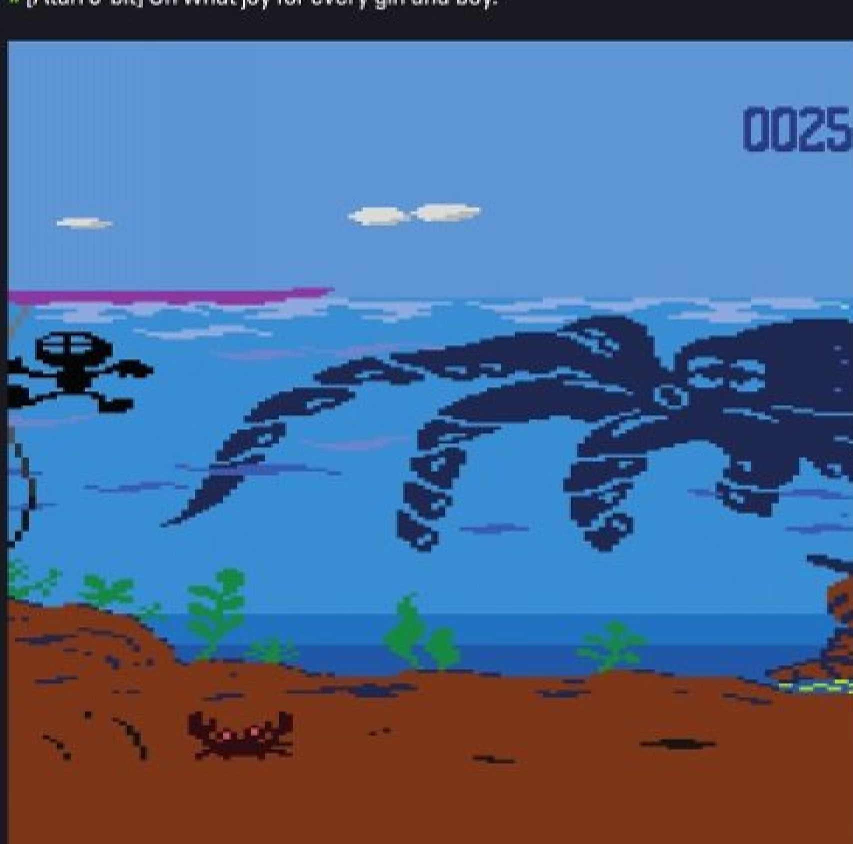
» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** ARSOFT CORPORATION
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/OCTOPUS-A8 » **PRICE:** FREE

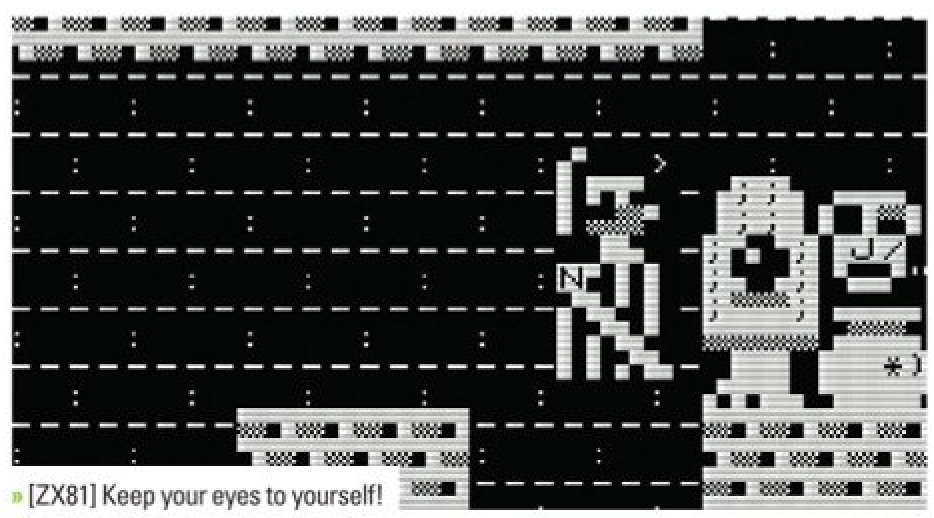
***Octopus* is based** on the Nintendo Game & Watch title of the same name, and the Atari has been persuaded to simulate the LCD display of the original; the player's diver only has six possible positions on screen, not including the one where he's been grabbed by the tentacles, and moving the joystick right or down advances him towards the underwater booty while left or up will retrace his steps back to the surface.

The octopus itself flexes its appendages and, if it manages to make contact, the hapless seafarer is captured and one of his comrades back in the boat steps in to take over until there aren't any left. The movement needs a little acclimatisation, but *Octopus* has attractive graphics and decent music throughout, is fun to play, and manoeuvring safely between tentacles when the game speeds up can be a simultaneously challenging and somewhat nerve-wracking experience.

77%

» [Atari 8-bit] Oh what joy for every girl and boy.




» [ZX81] Keep your eyes to yourself!



NANAKO IN CLASSIC JAPANESE MONSTER CASTLE

» **FORMAT:** ZX81 » **DEVELOPER:** THE MOJON TWINS
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/NANAKO-ZX81 » **PRICE:** FREE

Nanako has made a couple of visits to the Classic Japanese Monster Castle in the past, but it would seem they've had interior designers in and someone decided on an ASCII art theme. During the renovations, each room has been reduced slightly, all of the objects have doubled in size, and the levels have been redesigned.

Quite a bit of work has gone into making sure that, although it's visually quite busy, the play area doesn't collapse into a mess when moving, and Nanako herself manages to look quite sweet, despite being represented by a mere 16 graphics characters.

The 30 redesigned levels do seem a little easier to complete than previous iterations, and, apart from occasional bad luck with the random placement of the enemy, only a couple of stages put up a fight. Working through them is still entertaining.

82%

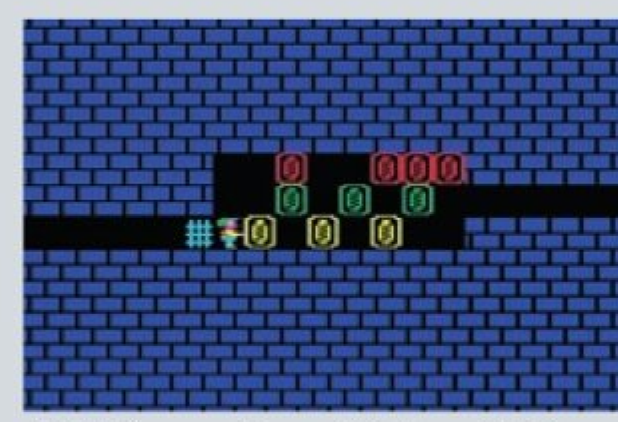
WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community


» [Spectrum] Gotta catch 'em all.

>> The collection bug

Dave Hughes, who we spoke to in issue 88 after he released *Stamp Quest* for the Spectrum, has been in touch because the rather cryptic screenshot he sent for that interview has metamorphosed into a nearly complete game. The working title is *Wunderchar*, and the objective is once more to collect objects, this time ranging from little eight-by-eight pixel versions of classic game sprites to the Spectrum font.


» [BBC] Like a cross between *Rush Hour* and *Sokoban*.

>> To me, to you

Glass Fractal Software has released a conversion of *MazezaM* for the BBC. This addictive action puzzle game, reminiscent of Firebird's *Thunderbirds*, was originally developed for the Spectrum by Malcolm Tyrrell in 2002 and subsequently converted to a host of platforms by Ventzislav Tzvetkov, so this Beeb version is in good company! **kikstart.eu/mazezam-bbc** knows where the download is.



» [C64] Woah, it's a snake!

>> Sheep and snakes

Psytronik has announced not one but two new C64 games. Richard Bayliss's *Sheepoid* is a spot of no-nonsense single-screen blasting, which was first shown at Retrovision and has been inspired by Jeff Minter's back catalogue. *Hyper Viper* by Jamie Howard is a scrolling maze-based variation of *Snake*, which has been lovingly converted from the MSX. Psytronik's website has details over at **psytronik.net**.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'SBREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

>> The quest continues

Soren 'Sokurah' Borgquist over at Tardis Remakes has posted an update for his ongoing remake of DOS game *X-Quest 2*, which is, in turn, a remake of *Crystal Quest* on the Macintosh. The screenshot we've included was taken at the start of 2011, and the game itself has been in production for a whopping three years now, because it's been paused to make way for other projects. It looks interesting and hopefully will be completed fairly soon. Check out how he's doing over at **tardis.dk/wordpress/?p=745**



>> Nyan nyan nyan

While meandering around the Xbox Live Indie Games marketplace, we stumbled across a quirky new release called *A Game About My Cat*, unsurprisingly a game about the author's cat, where she rides her litter tray down snow-covered mountains, performing tricks. The author says that he'd like to encourage other people to own cats and that's reason enough to mention it, as long as it doesn't turn innocent gamers into crazy cat people. **kikstart.eu/my-cat**

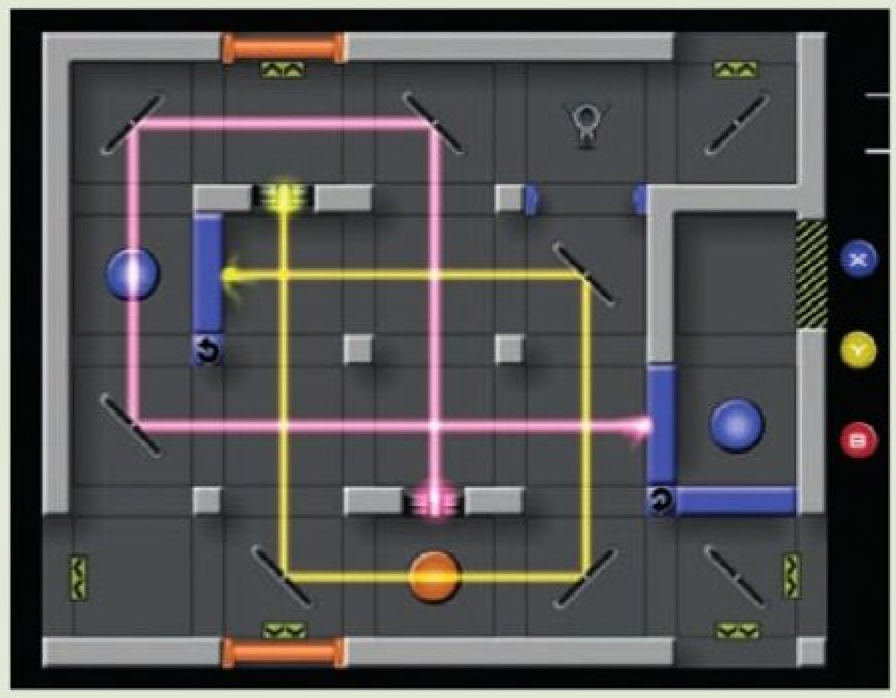
FLASH BOREDOM

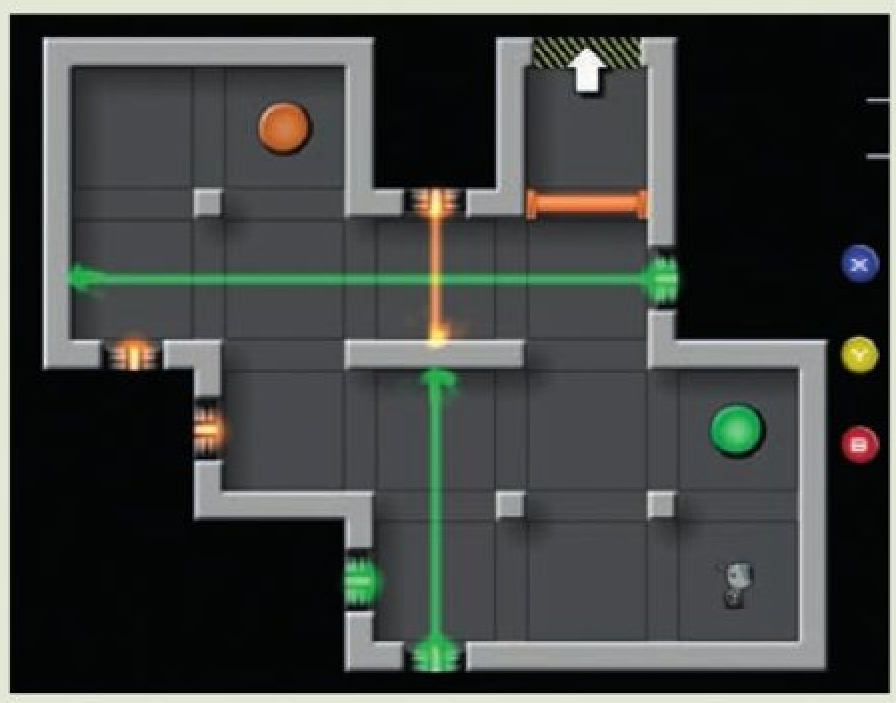


Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Luftrauser.**

THE SKIES AND seas are packed with enemy aircraft and something needs to be done. But flying into battle isn't easy because, along with turning to the point where you want to go and thrusting, all the while you're fighting the forces of gravity as well as the enemy. **kikstart.eu/luftrauser**

OTHER GAMES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .





BLOCK THE LASER

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/BLOCK-LASER

Despite the title, there are in fact multiple lasers in *Block The Laser*, and all of them are fatal to the cute, single-wheeled robot that requires the player's assistance to navigate to the safety of the exit. To create a safe route through each stage, the beams can either be toggled on or off and obstructed by the automatic doorways and turnstiles, with all of these features being operated by large, colour-coded buttons on the floor

One unusual feature of *Block The Laser* is how it handles the pressing of those buttons; if the player rolls onto a button and then continues forwards it'll remain depressed, but getting on and then reversing off undoes the move. The game's puzzles revolve around this design point, and screens that at first glance appear to be a simple case of a couple of button presses soon turn into long-winded journeys around the entire play area, possibly using buttons several times in the process.

The initial tutorial puzzles are nice and simple in order to introduce the player to how the doors, turnstiles, buttons and *Pac-Man*-style tunnels at the edges of the play area all work together before the harsh electric death of the lasers is introduced to the mix. Even then, a quick stab of the X button will restart the current level without any penalties, should the poor droid be accidentally obliterated.



DEMON'S PALACE

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/DEMONS-PALACE

Like *Life Fortress Volcabamba* reviewed a few issues ago, *Demon's Palace* is a PC game that spends all of its time pretending to be running on an MSX. This time the action is firmly platform-based, and collecting all the items scattered around while avoiding the evil minions will require quite a bit of dexterity.

While they're simple, the graphics are at least clear and colourful, and the in-game soundtrack and effects are in keeping with what MSX owners would expect to hear. The developer has managed to balance things well and, although challenging, it does encourage working through to the next collectable. The only negative is being dumped at the start screen after losing a life.



PLATFORMANCE: TEMPLE DEATH

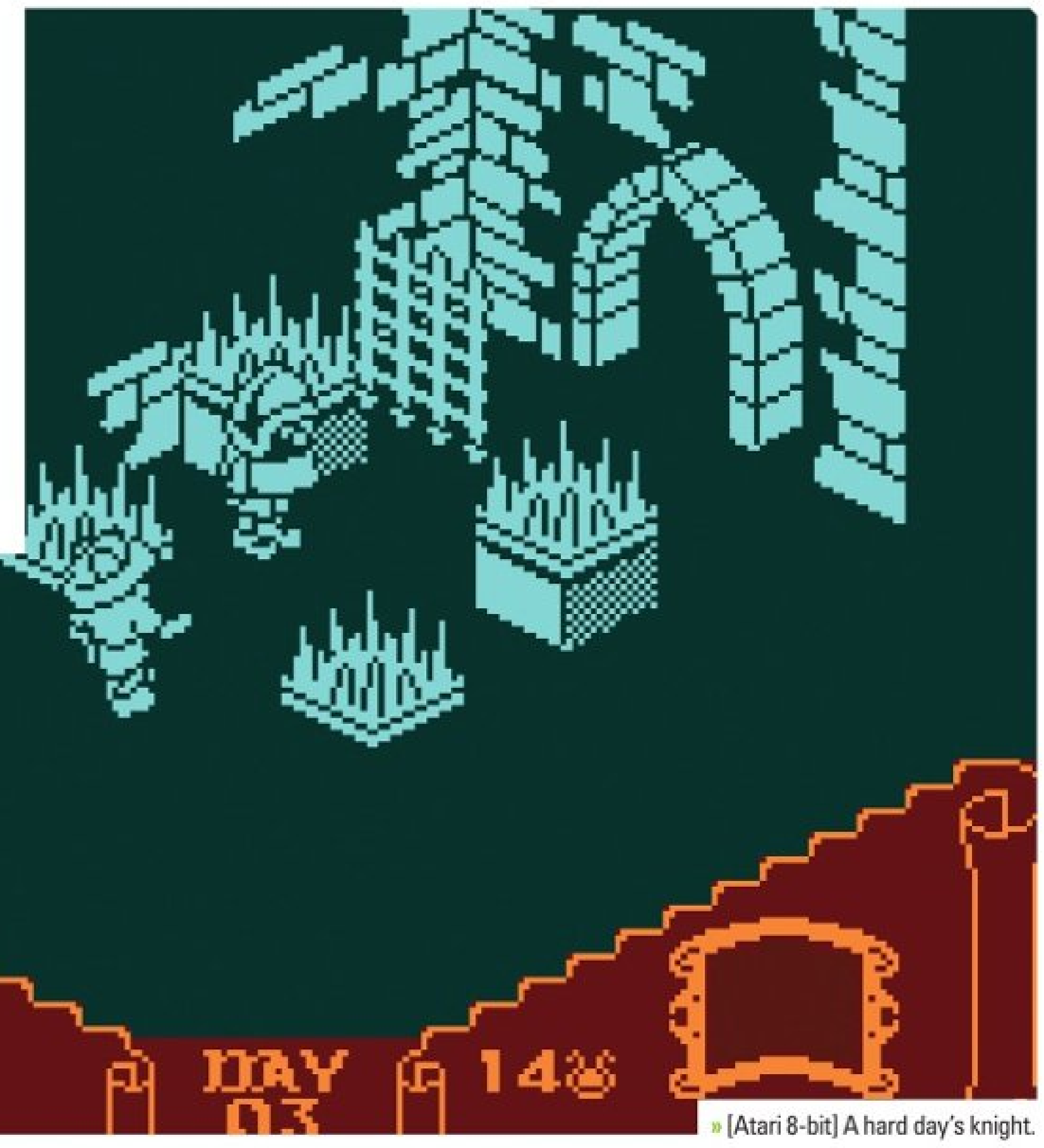
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/PLATFORMANCE

Platformance: Temple Death is another addition to the canon of *Rick Dangerous*-inspired platformers, those games where a Fedora-wearing hero with stubble swings into action to save the girl. Unlike its muse, *Platformance* doesn't limited your supply of lives, and the hero can be bitten, drowned, crushed or impaled pretty much as often as he likes, the only penalty being that he's returned to the last checkpoint.

Difficulty comes in three flavours, and even at the easiest setting there's a sense that *Platformance* wants to see the player skewered repeatedly; it isn't quite as vicious as fellow *Rick*-alike *1,000 Spikes*, but it can get frustrating, so play the trial before buying.







» [Atari 8-bit] A hard day's knight.

HOMEBREW HEROES

One of the busiest Atari 8-bit developers around is Krzysztof 'XXL' Dudek, whose games cover the range of genres from Sudoku to direct ports of Knight Lore and Jet Set Willy. He's in the process of converting 3D blaster Deathchase, and found some time in his obviously busy schedule to chat

Q&A

RG: What got you into developing homebrew games?
KD: Programming has always been my hobby and I have this luck that in my adulthood my hobby is also my work. Therefore, quite recently I thought that in my free time I will try to write something for retro hardware. I gathered all documentation and started to write patches for games. Finally I thought that maybe I can write my own game; I tried and so far I have published 25 different programs, and most of them are games.

RG: And why is the Atari 8-bit series your platform of choice?
KD: In one sentence, this is a computer with potential. This hardware has wide possibilities. Thanks to ANTIC, the video processor, we have the capability to define display like we know from the ZX Spectrum, BBC Micro or Apple II. On the second GTIA graphics chip we can generate eight-channel music and speech synthesis, and it has a faster processor than its direct competitors in those years.

RG: What have you found to be the most enjoyable parts of developing a game?
KD: The enjoyable stage of writing a game is the moment at which the game begins to work according to the assumptions, and the final stage, which is the release of a complete game. You can sit down and read the other users' comments, including those that are unfavourable, which can be the best tips for your future work.

RG: You've produced quite a few ports from other platforms. Are these easier or harder than starting from scratch?
KD: In the case of *Asteroids*, I emulated the vector generator. For *Night Driver* I replaced the sprite engine, but 90 per cent is their original code. In such cases, it is much easier to make conversions than to write a game from scratch. A similar situation exists with ports from the Apple II, BBC Micro or Oric Atmos, where all you need is the change of the system display, substitution of the interrupts, writing of your own procedures for controllers, and balancing the game settings associated with various processor clock speeds.

It's rather easy to write games based on existing games, where we don't need to invent mechanics or level data. However, porting from the ZX Spectrum is more difficult. Rewriting assembler code from Z80 to 6502 is a challenge if we want to preserve full game dynamics. However, the most difficult is to write the games where we need to design all the mechanics from scratch. Writing such games takes the longest time period and frequently, due to this reason, the project simply dies.

RG: And can you tell us about what you're working on at the moment?
KD: I'm currently working on several projects. The closest to the premiere are *Deathchase* and *Hobgoblin 2*. Some can be watched on my site, **xxl.atari.pl**, and YouTube channel (atari8xxl).

RG: Who would you say are your programming heroes?
KD: I learned programming by analysing some disassembled games written by other programmers like Ed Logg, Raffaele Cecco and Tim and Chris Stamper. Their programs are just perfect. It's not just that they wrote good games, but that they wrote very good code.

RG: Finally, what advice can you give to anybody wanting to become involved in homebrew development?
KD: Writing games is not only coding. There is a lack of graphic designers and musicians. Also noticeable is the lack of level designers. This is the other way to get involved in games development. They might be equally or more important features of the games, as they are more visible elements of retro games.

HIGH FIVE

The classic games that Krzysztof can't live without

1. **Invasion Of The Zombie Monsters (MSX)** Good idea, excellent realisation. There is also a ZX Spectrum version, but it's not so good.
2. **Zombie Calavera Prologue (ZX Spectrum)** The idea is not new, but the realisation is perfect. Very ingenious graphics.
3. **Crownland (Atari 8-bit)** Technically perfect. There were no such games on the Atari.
4. **Yoomp (Atari 8-bit)** Another demo of the possibilities of the Atari. Well-matched music with the action on screen.
5. **Stormlord (Oric Atmos)** If not the best, one of the best games on this computer.

MAILBAG

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STAR LETTER



WIN!

Every month, the star letter will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one.

DADDY COOL

Dear Retro Gamer,

Like so many parents, I've enjoyed seeing my son grow up being entertained by the SNES, N64 and Wii. However, the most dedicated gamer in my family was my dad, who was almost 70 years old when he discovered the joy of computer games, back in the mid-Eighties. Like the rest of the family, Dad had a very competitive streak, playing endless hours of cards with his brother when he was a youngster. Unfortunately, by the time he was 50, he was an invalid, mostly confined to an armchair. About 20 years later, my older brother had the inspired idea of lending Dad a BBC Micro, while he took Mum on holiday. On his return, he was astonished to find out that Dad had played *Snapper* almost non-stop during their absence, even during meals. Dad was hooked and very grateful that, shortly after, Jonathan was able to arrange for him to get an Electron of his own to continue his quest for an acorn bonus at *Snapper*. So enthusiastic was Dad that he started to get repetitive strain injury on his arms, which we affectionately dubbed '*Snapper*'s elbow'. This still did not deter Dad, though it did make him limit his hours of play. We were all so grateful for the Electron. It gave Dad an extraordinary lease on life and it was also a great point of contact with his grandchildren. Thanks so much to **Retro Gamer** for celebrating games as far back as the Eighties. Reading your magazine makes me very nostalgic for the many hours of excitement, fun and competition we shared.

Chris Beech

Hi, Chris. Like music and film, videogames can evoke fond memories and bring people together, regardless of their age. If they didn't, it would be fair to say this magazine probably wouldn't exist. Have an eMag for sharing such a touching and moving story with us.



GREETINGS FROM BRAZIL

Hello Retro Gamer,

My name is Flavio Alves Reis and I would like to congratulate you on an excellent magazine that is always full of great content.

After spending some time looking for a magazine dedicated to the topic of retro gamers – in Brazil, unfortunately we do not have many publications geared to this group – I was lucky enough to visit the Imagine Shop website, where I spotted the cover of issue 87 (Nintendo 64). I instantly ordered the magazine and enjoyed it so much that I've now subscribed!

The real reason for me writing to you, though, is to ask whether it might be possible for you to feature articles on two of my favourite game series in the magazine: *Lunar* (*The Silver Star* and *Eternal Blue*) and *Alundra*?

Best regards!

Flavio Alves Reis, Brasília (Brazil)

We're pleased to hear you've finally discovered us and have decided to take out a subscription, Flavio. In no way take this as a brazen attempt by us to try to butter you up, but there is a very good chance that you might see that making of *Alundra* appearing in the magazine before too long. So watch this space.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

The Apprentice final

This month saw *The Apprentice* come to an end, cultivating with a finale that saw tall Jim, Mr Bean, excitable happy cosmetics-obsessed girl and workaholic woman submit their business plans for Lord Sugar's consideration. A posture chair, an overnight cosmetics empire, a concierge service turned budget bakery at the eleventh hour, and something so vague that we can't even remember what it was were the ideas put forward. In the end it was the chair and the candidate with the worst record of winning tasks that walked away the victor, leaving us very confused.

THE LAME TEAM

I had to write to you to express how much I enjoyed reading the *A-Team* Retro Shamer in issue 90. I read it on a flight to Majorca and loved the understated way that the poorness of the game was described in the review. I read it to my girlfriend, who agrees that it was brilliant – she has very good taste, being the only girl I have ever met to own an original C64 copy of *The Great Giana Sisters* and have a love of both *Wonder Boy* and *Bubble Bobble*. She is also a fan of *The A-Team*, so I was surprised that she had never seen this game before. It has now become our quest to track down a copy and add it to our retro collection.

Keep up the good work,

Ian Stacey

Hi, Ian. As it was Stuart who wrote that particular feature, we passed your letter on to him. He said he was pleased it made you smile but warns you, in the strongest possible terms, not to waste even a second of your life trying to track

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

ANNOYING MOMENTS

TwoHeadedBoy That one level in *Sonic Adventure 2* where you have five minutes to find all the emerald bits as Rouge the Bat. Back in 2002 I was determined to finish that level before going on holiday for a week. Utterly failed, and then spent the whole holiday thinking about it. That was annoying.

ShadowMan *Mega Man 3* for the Game Boy has one annoying level – the second half of Dustman's level has several pixel perfect jumps, one after another. The kicker is that you can't use the Rush Jet power-up to avoid the whole bit because you have to beat Dustman in order to unlock it.

ShadowNeku That water level in *Rayman* on the PSone where you have to jump across the floating balls, avoiding the jumping fish. Horrible, horrible level. In fact, practically any level once you finish the forest.

DPrinny End of *Half-Life 2: Episode Two*. So I have to destroy these bloody things with a shitty sticky bomb that can only be got from certain places? GIVE ME A SODDING ROCKET LAUNCHER!!

PS2 VS DREAMCAST

DigitalDuck I prefer the Dreamcast. The PS2 had quite a few good games, but I do feel that it didn't really have any truly outstanding games. *Shenmue*, *Chu Chu Rocket*, *Jet Set Radio* and *Skies Of Arcadia* reign supreme over pretty much the entire PS2 library for me.

ShadowNeku Just like how the PlayStation stamped all over Sega's Saturn, Sony's PlayStation 2 wipes the floor with Sega's Dreamcast.

Fightersmegamix Well I guess the simple answer is the PS2 is better overall, but given their lifespans that's not surprising. The Dreamcast is a console I love. Exciting, bright graphics and fun games just blew me away at the time. PS2 I really couldn't get on with for a long time. Only warmed to it at the end of its life cycle with stuff like *Okami* and *Dragon Quest*. So love the Dreamcast, respect the PS2.

THE RG BOARD RECIPE BOOK

sscott Madras curry. You'll need: a telephone. Everest Restaurant – best in Sheffield!

SirClive Get some crumpets, spread tomato puree on top. Add sweetcorn and sliced Peperami Hot. Dollop a load of cottage cheese on top, a sprinkle of black pepper and grill. Voila – crumpet pizza.

djcarlos 1. Take one fresh pitta bread.
2. Liberally spread the insides with butter.
3. Fry an egg – or two if you're feeling extravagant.
4. Put the eggs into the pitta, then stuff with smoky bacon crisps, some ham and loads of cheese.
5. Grill till it's leakin'.
6. Eat.
7. Repeat until coronary.

mohicankid Go to freezer, take out 1 litre tub of ice cream, pick up spoon. Done!



CONTACT US

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* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



High Score: 68,600



DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: GYRUSS

Why I picked it: It's a superb little shooter from Konami that I'm actually reasonably good at.

Handy tip: The bonus stages reward you handsomely for finishing waves, so learn their attack patterns.



High Score: 928,636



STUART

CHOSEN GAME: IN THE HUNT

Why I picked it: I was recently reminded of this beautiful but insanely challenging shooter from Irem.

Handy tip: Always try to equip the green 'spread shot' power-up, as it makes your life a lot easier.

down a copy of that game. He muttered something about how a far more effective use of your time could be trying to break into Hollywood's A-list, or building a bridge to the sun made entirely from Calippo ice lollies.

LOVE OF THE 8-BITS

Hey guys,

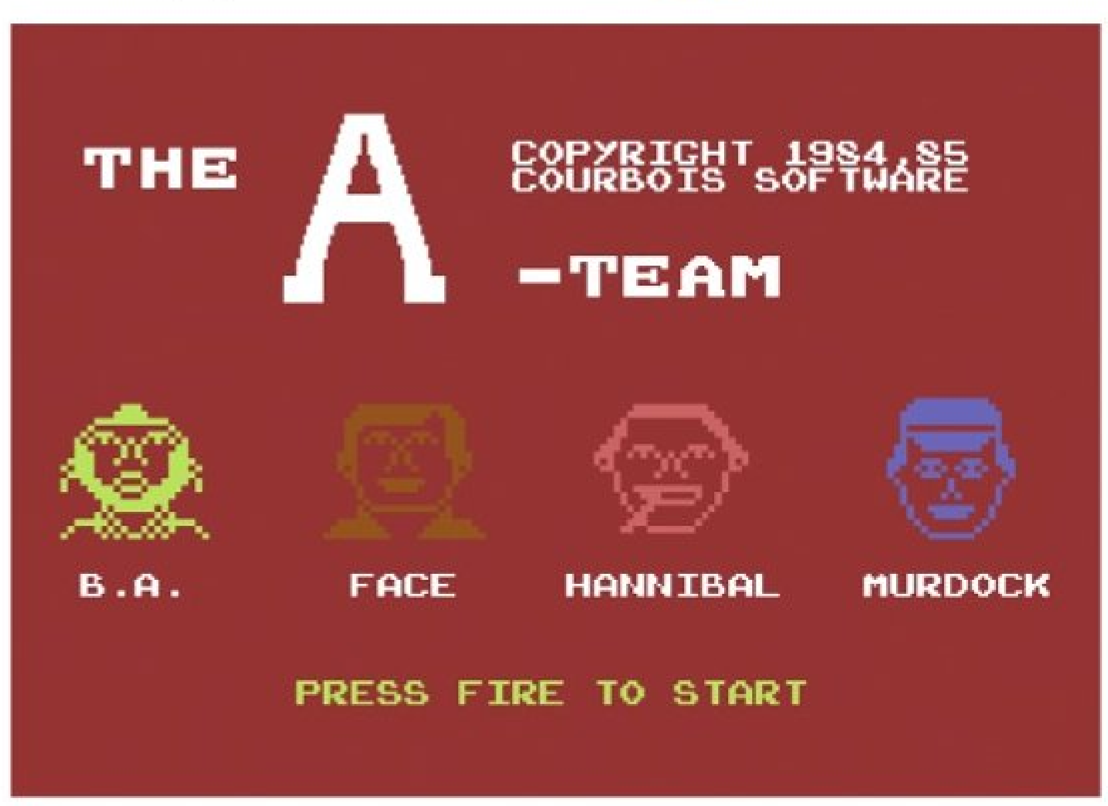
I just wanted to write in to say how much I enjoyed the excellent End Of The 8-bits feature in your last issue. It was a wonderfully researched article, very fascinating, and also brought back some great memories. Keep up the good work and please can we have more features like this in the magazine?

Regards,

Paul Remy

Glad to hear that you enjoyed Martyn's article, Paul. You'll be pleased to hear that we have plenty more features like that one in the pipeline, including one that will look into the causes and effects of the videogame crash of 1983.

> "Dad started to get RSI in his arms, which we named 'Snapper's elbow'"



» [C64] *The A-Team* is the worst licensed videogame we've come across by a long way. That said, it does play a good rendition of the *Star Wars* theme music.

OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which *Galaga* game is the best?

DigitalDuck
Galaga Legions DX. They're both great games, but *DX* is much more exciting and fast-paced.

ncf1
Galaga is one classic that never, ever will be replaced for me by any 'sequels'.

Galaga



Galaga Legions DX



67% | 33%

retro GAMER

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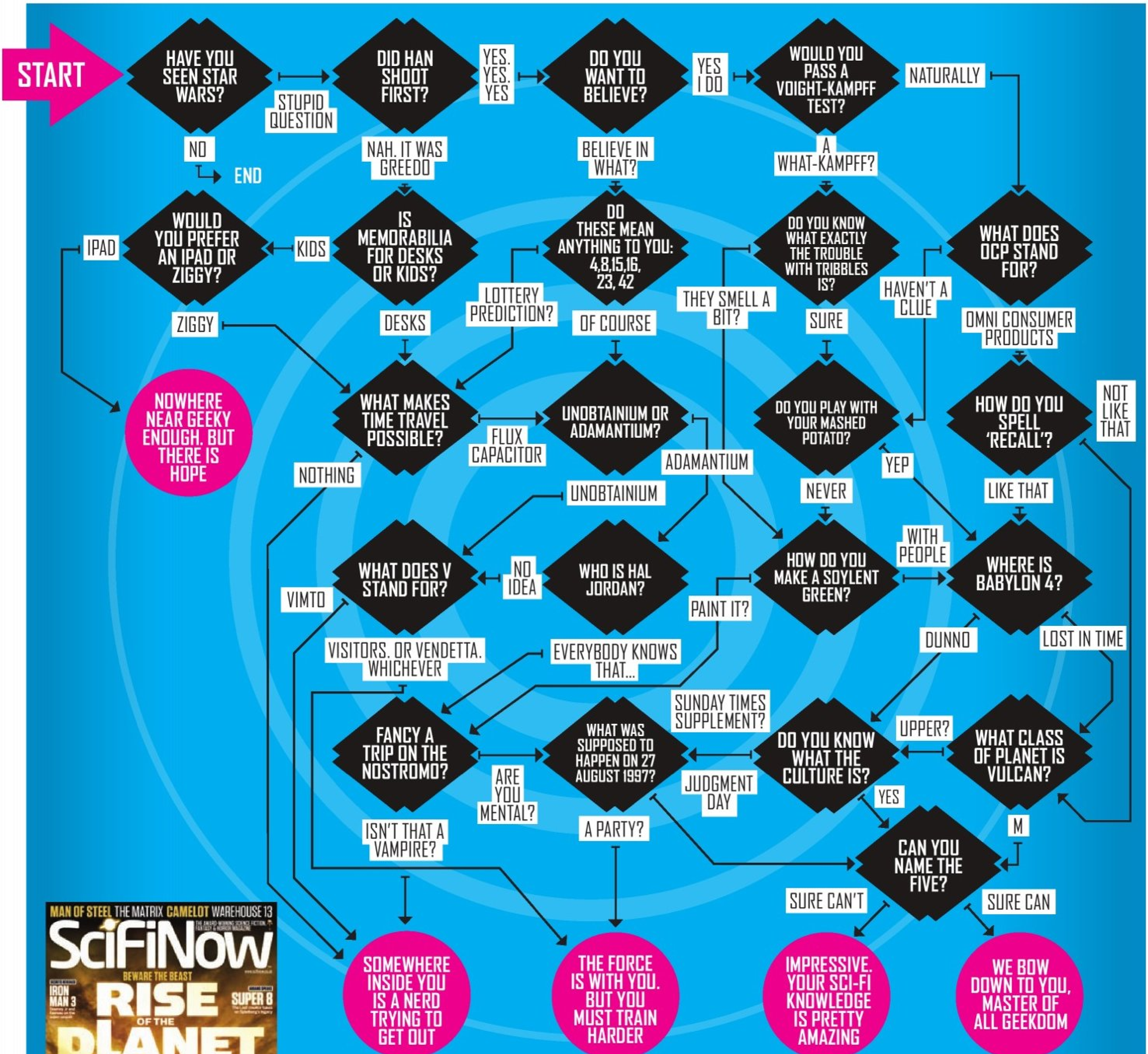
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Art Attack!

We speak to key artists and discover the tools and tricks they used to create great graphics on the Amiga

ALSO IN THE NEXT ISSUE



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■ Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick look back at the creation of LucasArts' first SCUMM-based adventure



Game Boy Advance

■ With Nintendo's handheld now a decade old, we reveal the best GBA games that weren't SNES conversions



Command & Conquer

■ Discover how Westwood Studios created an RTS monster that dominated the genre for years to come



Bubble Bobble

■ Our latest Ultimate Guide tells you everything you ever needed to know about Taito's hit coin-op






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ENDGAME



THE LOST VIKINGS

» Before Blizzard was Blizzard, the studio was known as Silicon & Synapse, and prior to hitting the big time with the colossally popular PC franchises Warcraft, Diablo and StarCraft, its first successful game was The Lost Vikings. This action/puzzle game is about three calamitous Vikings, each with a unique skill, who find themselves kidnapped by an alien emperor and stuck in various places across time and space. So do the trio make it home in three pieces?



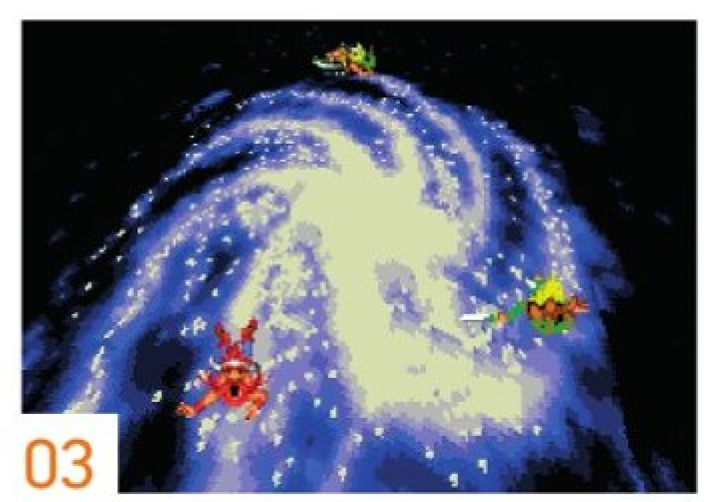
01

» After defeating the evil alien emperor Tomator, the three Vikings banish him through the airlock of his ship. This leaves the Vikings in charge of a brand new alien spaceship, and a means to get home if they work out how to steer it.



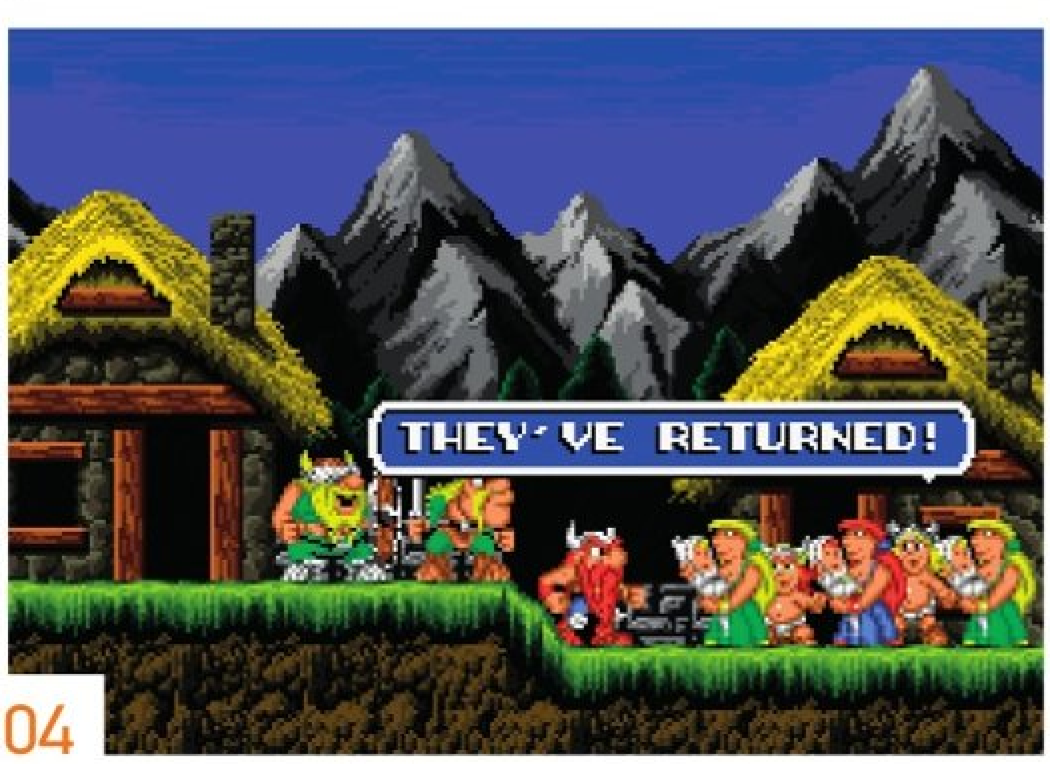
02

» Olaf pipes up that he thinks he might have an idea. If you've been following the actions of the three Vikings up until this point, you know that this can only end in tears. These three couldn't operate a marshmallow between them.



03

» With the ship set to blow any second – well, five, to be exact – to avoid getting vaporised by the imminent explosion, the trio make the sensible decision to jump straight into a time portal that could land them absolutely anywhere.



04

» The three touch down in familiar surroundings, and a quick stroll reveals that the Vikings can now drop the 'lost' part of the name – they've made it home to their village, where identical-looking Viking women and babies celebrate their safe return.



05

» Of course, the Vikings couldn't resist some plunder. Somehow managing to conceal two guitars, a drum kit and a colossal speaker system, they form a band and kick off the festivities, before splitting two weeks later after Erik snapped his strings.


The Elder Scrolls V
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11·11·11
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